


# **The Grey Nuns in the Far North**

By  
**Rev. Father P. Duchaussois, O.M.I.**



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THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH



# THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

(1867-1917)

By

Rev. Father P. DUCHAUSSOIS, O.M.I.

*Those women who have laboured with us in the Gospel.*

—(Phil. IV. 3.)

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFATORY LETTER . . . . .	7
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	11

### CHAPTER I.—MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK.

Her Ancestry, Youth and Marriage—Founding of the Religious Institute of the Grey Nuns, Montreal, 1738—She takes charge of the Hospital of Ville-Marie, 1747—The Hospital Burned—Death of Madame d'Youville—Branches of the Institute established .	13
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

### CHAPTER II.—“STEPPING WESTWARD”: THE RED RIVER (1844).

The Grey Nuns answer the call to the Red River—The journey to the West—Trials and hardships at St. Boniface . . . . .	29
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

### CHAPTER III.—FURTHER WEST AND NORTH.

Death of Bishop Provencher—Missions of Lake Ste. Anne and St. Albert—Trying journey and experiences at Ile à la Crosse—Lac La Biche (1859-62)—Conditions among the Indians . . . . .	43
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

### CHAPTER IV.—THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

Grey Nuns asked to go from Montreal to Fort Providence on the Mackenzie River—Extent of the Mackenzie district—Tribes of Indians and their character—

---

# THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

---

PAGE

Difficulty of sustaining the convents—How they were supported—Food and supplies, how secured—Dangers of travel . . . . . 61

## CHAPTER V.—THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL, FORT PROVIDENCE (1867-1917).

Founding of Providence Mission—Early hardships—Journey of the Sisters from St. Boniface—Great difficulties of travel—Arrival at Fort Providence—Incidents of dangers of northern travel—Barbaric practices of the Indians—Stories of Indian children—The care of the sick—Agriculture in the far north—Disasters to crops—Orders to withdraw from the Mission—Delay and countermanding of order—Golden Jubilee and Banquet . . . . . 86

## CHAPTER.—VI. THE CONVENT OF THE HOLY ANGELS, NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA (1874).

History and description of Nativity Mission—New convent founded at Lake Athabaska—Great hardships and privation . . . . . 145

## CHAPTER VII.—ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE, FORT RESOLUTION, GREAT SLAVE LAKE (1903).

Arrival of Grey Nuns before convent is built for them—Completion of the Hospice—Difficulties of securing food . . . . . 163

## CHAPTER VIII.—NEW FOUNDATIONS.

Fort Smith—Hospital and school established—Fort Simpson—Indian agency established—Hospital—Mac-



---

## CONTENTS

---

	PAGE
Murray—The Eskimos—Murder of Fathers Le Roux and Rouvière.	

### CHAPTER IX.—THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS.

Zeal and faith of the Sisters—Health in spite of poor diet and hardships—Happiness under all conditions—Service and sacrifice—Consolation of the Holy Communion—The statue of Lourdes—Providential aid—Anxiety of the Sisters to serve in the far north—Visit of the Mother General—Play given by Indian children . . . . .	200
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

### CHAPTER X.—THEIR FRUITS.

Revolution of Indian ideas concerning Women—Care of the sick—Transformation by Religious teaching—Excellence of school training given to the children—Papers published by the Grey Nuns in the north—Interesting stories of Indian charges of the Sisters . . . . .	233
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

### EPILOGUE—

A review of the lives of the Grey Nuns who founded the Sacred Heart Hospital at Fort Providence . . . . .	266
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

### APPENDIX—

The main works held presently, both in Canada and the United States, by the five great families of the Grey Nuns founded by the Venerable Mother d' Youville . . . . .	277
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
VERY REVEREND MOTHER, M. A. PICHÉ . . . . .	6
VENERABLE MOTHER D'YOUVILLE . . . . .	18
VISITING THE POOR IN THE FAR NORTH . . . . .	34
MGR. A. TACHÉ, O.M.I. . . . .	44
THE PRESENT COMMUNITY OF ST. ALBERT . . . . .	48
RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP E. GROUARD, O.M.I., D.D. . . . .	64
A CAMP OF "SLAVES" INDIANS . . . . .	67
FISHING THROUGH HOLES IN THE ICE . . . . .	79
AFTER THE CATCH . . . . .	83
THE FORT PROVIDENCE CATHOLIC MISSION . . . . .	88
HOLY MASS IN A TENT . . . . .	95
PASSING THROUGH THOUSANDS OF ROCKS . . . . .	100
INDIANS AND HALF-BREEDS TOWING A BARGE . . . . .	104
LEAPING A CASCADE ON ATHABASKA RIVER . . . . .	109
EMBARKING AT FORT SMITH, IN 1917 . . . . .	113
A GROUP OF ORPHAN GIRLS, IN THE EARLY DAYS . . . . .	120
THREE SISTERS OF THE HARE-SKINS TRIBE . . . . .	124
IN THE FIELDS, FORT PROVIDENCE . . . . .	130
THE FIRST CONVENT AT FORT PROVIDENCE (1867) . . . . .	136
THE CONVENT OF FORT PROVIDENCE (1917), INAUGURATED IN 1899 . . . . .	138
BOATING ON THE MACKENZIE, FORT PROVIDENCE . . . . .	142
COMMUNITY OF THE HOLY ANGELS (1917), LAKE ATHABASKA . . . . .	150
MISSION OF THE NATIVITY, LAKE ATHABASKA (1917) . . . . .	155
READY? . . . . .	159

---

## ILLUSTRATIONS

---

	PAGE
FORT RESOLUTION (GREAT SLAVE LAKE) IN SUMMER TIME . . . . .	163
RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP GABRIEL BREYNAT, O.M.I., D.D. . . . .	165
LITTLE DOG-RIBS INDIANS AT PLAY . . . . .	169
SAINT JOSEPH CONVENT AND SCHOOL, GREAT SLAVE LAKE . . . . .	174
AT FORT SMITH IN 1917 . . . . .	180
AT DAY SCHOOL, IN FORT SMITH . . . . .	183
A GROUP OF MISSIONARY SISTERS OF MACKENZIE, 1916 . . . . .	190
AN ESKIMO FAMILY OF THE BARREN LAND (THEIR SUMMER CAMP) . . . . .	195
HIS GRACE BISHOP BREYNAT, O.M.I. . . . .	198
ORPHAN BOYS CUTTING WOOD SUPPLY . . . . .	204
THE SEWING CLASS . . . . .	211
"SCOWS" AT ANCHOR ON THE ATHABASKA RIVER . . . . .	225
A LESSON IN CHARITY . . . . .	236
THE STUDY HALL, AT ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL, FORT RESO- LUTION, GREAT SLAVE LAKE . . . . .	240
THE LEAGUE OF THE SACRED HEART, FORT RESOLUTION	245
CHILDREN OF MARY, FORT RESOLUTION . . . . .	248
LOUIS . . . . .	258
CHRISTINA . . . . .	263
SISTER DOMITHILDA (1919) . . . . .	269
REV. MOTHER WARD (1919) . . . . .	271
MAP OF THE MISSIONS OF THE EXTREME NORTH . . . . .	280
THE MOTHER HOUSE OF THE GREY NUNS AT MONT- REAL . . . . .	287



VERY REVEREND MOTHER, M. A. PICHÉ,  
Present Superior General of The Grey  
Nuns of Montreal.

## PREFATORY LETTER

*Addressed to Reverend Mother Piché, Mother General of the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) of the General Hospital of Montreal.*

FORT PROVIDENCE, MACKENZIE RIVER,  
N.W. Territories, August 28th, 1917.  
L.J.C. & M.I.

DEAR REVEREND MOTHER,—

FIFTY years ago this very day, five of the spiritual daughters of the Venerable Mother d'Youville reached Fort Providence. They had left Montreal for this wild north land of ours on September 17, 1866, in order to devote their lives to the religious instruction and education of the poor Indians of the far North. Their convent here they called Sacred Heart Hospital, as if to show that all the ills of humanity would claim their care.

We cannot sound the depths of the designs of Divine Providence. We cannot tell why these poor Indians, the disinherited ones of the earth, living on its uttermost borders, were so long left without

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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having the Gospel preached to them. But we may lawfully take notice of the fact that God at length chose, for the work of their civilization, a religious Society whose Founder, Bishop de Mazenod, with his last breath, recommended to his disciples, along with charity, zeal in preaching the Gospel to the poor. Was it not in the right order of things that such missionary preachers should, amid their self-denying labours, find valiant helpers in those heroic nuns whom the Church has judged worthy of the distinctive name of Sisters of Charity? As a matter of fact, other helpers had been sought in vain. Indeed the scene of labour opened before them was far from inviting, especially in those pioneer times, and such immense distances from civilization.

The following pages have been written to show how generously the Grey Nuns hearkened to the call which they heard, and how faithfully and fruitfully they have worked in the various duties of their holy vocation. This book does not tell all. There is only one book in which all is told, the Book of Life, "in quo totum continetur," as we chant in the *Dies Irae*. But the Book of Life is under the jealous guard of the Angels until the day when all hearts shall be revealed.

Dear Reverend Mother, when all the entries of that Book of Life are made known, the world



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## PREFATORY LETTER

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will be surprised, but your Community will have reason to rejoice and to be glad. Meanwhile, be pleased to accept this little volume as a small token of our grateful remembrance of those devout women who have laboured along with us in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is nothing written in this work to which I cannot bear witness as the absolute truth. The author describes the things which he himself has seen, or of which he has personally collected the evidence. He has written at my special request, and as the interpreter of my own feelings. With his talent, and devotion to his task, he could not but succeed. I congratulate him, and I thank him with all my heart.

It is to be hoped that this true tale of the heroic works of the Grey Nuns in the Northwest will inspire many generous souls to follow in their steps. The power of example is very great. Greatest of all ought to be the power and attraction of examples which show true nobility of soul. Hearts capable of self-denial are everywhere to be found. They need but a spark of the heavenly fire to kindle them, and to make them feel what high deeds they might do for the love of God.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus, "the Burning Furnace of Charity," deign to make use of this

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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pledge of our religious gratitude as a means to set many a heart on fire with a vocation for your admirable missionary Institute.

I remain, Dear Reverend Mother, with much respect,

Yours devotedly

in our Lord and Mary Immaculate,

GABRIEL BREYNAT, O.M.I.,

*Bishop of Adramyttium,*

*Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie.*



## INTRODUCTION

TO THE Queen of the Apostles I dedicate this book.

It is not a full history of the Grey Nuns in the far North. Even a large volume would not suffice to tell all the wonderful things which I was privileged to see and to admire, during the months which I spent in visiting the posts which they occupy in the vanguard of the Church. But I hope the reader will find here evidence enough of one of the grandest examples of self-devotion which the Church of Christ Crucified has ever inspired in the course of ages.

Like the Church herself—of which they are the life-guards and “storm-troops”—the various religious societies are successful and efficient in the measure in which they are faithful to the spirit of their Founders. Hence I will begin by telling of the Foundress of the Canadian Sisters of Charity, the model most faithfully copied, the Venerable Mother d’ Youville, that “Mother to be admired above measure, and worthy to be remembered by good men” (2 Macc. VII.). Like mother, were the daughters, as the course of our story will show.

I have thought it desirable to make mention

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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also of the pioneer Sisters of the Red River (Winnipeg) who, seventy-four years ago, had prepared the way for their sisters of the Mackenzie district. They set out from Montreal in a birch-bark canoe. The traveller's heart always beats high, and his eye lights up, when, upon the thorny pathway, he finds the footmarks of those of his own name and race, who have cleared the road that he is following.

May the Mother of Divine Grace obtain a blessing upon a work undertaken in obedience to the wishes of the Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie, and intended to make the self-sacrificing labours of the Grey Nuns better known, and their poor Indians better loved.

## CHAPTER I.

### MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK.

THE first of the Grey Nuns was Madame d'Youville, *née* Marie Marguerite Dufrost de la Jemmerais. Her father, Christopher, in 1687, left the three-centuries-old château of La Jemmerais at Médréac in the diocese of St. Malo, in Brittany, to fight against the Iroquois in Canada. He was made a Captain for his bravery in the field.

Madame d'Youville's mother, Marie Renée de Varennes, was the daughter of René de Varennes, and grand-daughter of the sieur Boucher de Boucherville, each of whom was, in his day, Governor of Three Rivers. Two of the brothers of Marie Renée de Varennes were priests. Another brother was the celebrated de la Vérandrye (de Varennes), the first explorer of the banks of the Red River and the Assiniboine. His sister, Marie Louise, was the great-grandmother of Mgr. Taché, O.M.I., the first Archbishop of St. Boniface (Red River).

Marie Marguerite, the eldest of six children, was born on October 15, 1701, in the manor-house of Varennes, on the banks of the Saint Lawrence. When she was only seven years old, her father died,

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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leaving to his family the example of all those virtues which are often, under God, the flower and fruit of poverty and Christian nobleness. From this early age may be dated the beginning of the long career of self-sacrifice of Marie Marguerite. She never had as her own more than the two years which she spent—in preparation for her First Communion—in the Ursuline Convent at Quebec.

On August 12, 1722, Marie Marguerite was married to François d'Youville, a gentleman of Ville-Marie, and son of Pierre You. Though religiously prepared for, on her part, her marriage brought her nothing but unhappiness. A jealous mother-in-law, and a bad and cruel husband, soon turned from thoughts of earth a heart which was too large for earth to fill. Her soul quickly sought an incomparably higher ideal than worldly happiness. Being of the number of the specially elect, she was destined to belong to God alone. She had, therefore, to pass through the noviceship of the Saints, a noviceship of suffering, most patiently borne.

After six years of what may justly be called a martyrdom, the good samaritan was found to pour out oil and wine upon her wounds. This consoler and spiritual guide was the parish priest of Ville Marie, M. Dulescoat, a Sulpician. To what heights of holiness she was raised under the wise

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## MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK

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direction of this man of God will be told in the process of her beatification, for it may be said with all confidence that the Church is about to propose Madame d'Youville as a model for many who suffer.

Her husband died on July 4, 1730. She had loved him sincerely, and she mourned him sincerely, too. But she lifted up her head, and placed all her confidence in God. Her great and special devotion was directed to the Eternal Father, the support of all weakness, the source of all good. She gave her attention at once to the fulfilment of her duties as widow and mother. She had to pay the household debts, and bring up the two children who remained to her. To these duties her ardent zeal soon added others: the service of the poor, the sick, and prisoners, and of all those in whom the eye of Faith discovers a special resemblance to our Divine Master. Her *Lives*, by M. Faillon and Madame Jetté, tell in detail of her prayers, and vigils, and good works.

M. l'Abbé Dulescoat remained her trusted director until his death in 1733.

The name of his successor will be held for ever in benediction among the Grey Nuns, who look upon him as the Co-Founder of their Institute. This worthy Sulpician Priest was M. Normant de Faradon. He was highly intelligent, prudent, and

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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mortified, and specially zealous for the promotion of God's glory by serving the poor. He continued the work begun by M. Dulescoat, and guided Madame d'Youville on the road to perfection in piety and self-sacrifice.

After a time Madame d'Youville's debts were paid, and her two sons were priests, François becoming eventually Curé of St. Ours and Charles of Boucherville (parishes on the right bank of the St. Lawrence, not far from Montreal). She was free to devote herself and all that she possessed to the service of the poor.

If at that moment the vision had been granted to her of a wide-spreading tree, planted by her hands under the shadow of the Cross, giving shelter to sufferers from all the ills which flesh is heir to, a tree whose branches cover the face of America, assuredly such a revelation would have terrified her humility. She had in view simply a little group of pious, pure, and practical workers, who would edify each other at home, and would do all the good that was in their power outside, among the poor. She found three young ladies of good will who joined her. They were Mlles. Thaumur-Lassource, Demers and Cusson. The little beginning of a community was formed on the last day of the year 1737.

At first the pious friends kept their own



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## MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK

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counsel, and did not appear before the world as a community. They went slowly, in order to go safely. At length, on the eve of All Saints Day in 1738, the new community took up its abode in a rented house in Montreal, into which ten poor people were very soon welcomed. In such humble fashion was laid that evening the foundation stone of what is now a great edifice, the Religious Institute of the Grey Nuns, the Sisters of Charity, of the General Hospital of Montreal. It was in truth a simple and humble beginning: nothing but a prayer, the reading of a short Rule of Life, and a little discourse by Abbé Normant. The prayer, in presence of a little statue of Mary Immaculate, besought our Blessed Lady to accept the Act by which her poor servants were consecrating themselves for life to the service of Jesus Christ in his afflicted members. When the General Hospital was burnt to the ground in 1765, the statue was found uninjured, and it has been preserved by the Nuns as a sign that their prayer was heard, and their offering accepted. The Rule, given to them by their spiritual director, stated that the Associates would live in common on the fruit of their own exertions, and with no other bond than mutual charity. Charity has ever remained the distinctive note of the Grey Nuns. In his discourse, Abbé Normant told those first associates of Charity that

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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VENERABLE MOTHER d'YOUVILLE,  
Foundress of the Order of the Grey Nuns in America,  
whose number now exceeds four thousand.



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## MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK

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the Cross of Christ was the one support of all works undertaken for God, and that they must be prepared for opposition and persecution, which could be overcome only by patience, charity, and meekness.

The preacher's words were a prediction. No trials were spared his spiritual children. Death visited them in 1741, when the gentle Mlle. Cusson was called to her reward. Sickness tried them for seven continuous years. During all that time, the beloved mother of the community had to keep her bed, suffering from a knee disease brought on by walking so frequently in the snow, on the way to hear Mass, or to visit the sick. Another affliction came when that first house of theirs was burnt down on January 13, 1745, and they had to rush out into the dark and the intense cold when only half-clad. Insults, too, they had to bear. They were hissed and hooted, and calumniated. It was said they gave strong drink to the Indians, and used it very freely themselves. Some witty people called them *Soeurs Grises*, the same French word meaning grey and tipsy. When the time came to choose a religious habit, Mother d'Youville selected the grey colour, bearing in mind how our Divine Lord was mocked by the crowd, while suffering the death reserved for slaves. So it was that a name given in derision became a name of honour. That name,

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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chosen by the Foundress in the spirit of humility, has stirred many a heart like a trumpet-call, rousing the desire to be clothed in that badge of humility and charity.

That first little community bore, therefore, as we see, the mark of the Cross, the token of God's love. The time came when it was called to enlarge the place of its tent, to lengthen its cords, and strengthen its stakes. Father Dulescoat had said in the beginning to Madame d'Youville, as if in prophecy, "Take courage, my child; God has a great work in store for you; you will support and uplift a house tottering to its fall." This great work was already plain enough, though in its beginnings. For ten years it had been growing, in observance of the Rule, and in the self-consecration of the earliest days. There was a well-established community of six members, Milles. Thaumur, Demers, Rainville, Laforme, Veronneau, and the Foundress. The tottering house, in the year 1747, appealed to their charity. It was the General Hospital of Ville-Marie.

The Hospital of Ville-Marie was founded in 1692 by François Charon de la Barre, on ground given by the Seminary of St. Sulpice. It was officially approved by Letters Patent of Louis XIV on April 15, 1694. Mgr. de Saint-Vallier, Bishop of Quebec, on October 8, 1723, gave his approba-

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## MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK

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tion to a religious community—the Brothers Hospitallers of St. Joseph of the Cross—which was to have charge of this Hospital for the benefit of orphans, and sick or infirm men. In 1747 this establishment was in truth in a tottering state. There were only two Brothers, in charge of four poor people, and not really able to provide even for these. The house itself was in such a state as may be guessed from the fact that 1,226 panes of glass were wanting.\*

On October 7, 1747, owing to the efforts of Father Normant, this decayed Hospital of Ville-Marie was placed under the control of Madame d'Youville, who had to be carried there on a mattress, in a cart. She was followed by her five companions, and nine poor people. Once more was the good work marked with the sign which stamps works done for God. The trial this time was one of the hardest of all to bear, for it came from those who ought to have been the defenders of right, and

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\*Francois Charon, founder of the Hospital and the Brothers Hospitallers, was born in Quebec in 1654. When thirty-four years of age, he gave up a prosperous business, in order to devote himself to the service of the afflicted. He died in 1719, in France, whither he had gone in search of men of good will who would imitate his own courage and self-devotion. The Grey Nuns, who came into possession of the Hospital property, venerate the memory of Brother Charon. The principal assistant of Brother Charon was Pierre le Ber, the brother of Jeanne le Ber. Jeanne was the pious recluse, of whom it was said that "the perfume of her virtues made the whole Colony fragrant."

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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protectors of weakness. On one hand, the Court of France did not wish any new Congregation of women to be founded in Canada. On the other hand, the Bishop of Quebec was convinced that Mother d'Youville's little community would not survive herself, and so he easily let himself be persuaded that the best thing to do was to transfer to the Hospital of Quebec whatever property belonged to the Hospital of Montreal.\* The Governor approved of the Bishop's decision. One day, as Mother d'Youville was returning from the market, where she had been buying food for the poor people under her care, she heard it proclaimed, with beat of drum, by order of the Bishop, of the Governor and of the Intendant, that her authority over the Hospital was at an end, and that the Institution was transferred to Quebec.

However, the Society of Saint Sulpice was on guard. M. Cousturier, Superior General of Sulpicians in Paris, pleaded his cause so well before the Court of France that Louis XV, on June 3, 1753, issued Letters Patent confirming Madame d'Youville and her companions in the administration of the Hospital of Ville-Marie. Happier days were dawning, and bringing visible signs of the Divine Blessing. On June 15, 1755, Mgr. de Pontbriant,

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\*Of course, Montreal was not a separate diocese at this time. Ville-Marie was the first name of Montreal, and it is still the name of a suburb.

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## MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK

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Bishop of Quebec, gave canonical approbation to the new Sisterhood. Two months later, on August 25, the feast of St. Louis, the Grey Nuns appeared in their parish church, wearing for the first time the religious habit received that morning at the hands of Father Louis Normant. The people bowed respectfully as the new Nuns passed.

It was not until July 30, 1880, that their Religious Institute was solemnly and finally approved by Pope Leo XIII. But, from the first episcopal approbation, the youthful society waxed strong. It needed to be strong in order to be able to survive the new trials which came upon it.

When England gained possession of Canada, the great feudal families returned to France. Benefactors disappeared one by one. Mother d'Youville, who was an admirable business woman, as well as a Religious Foundress, had recourse to all sorts of industrious plans in order to make ends meet. Needlework, gardening, limeburning, tobacco growing—everything was tried. Mother d'Youville was responsible for the building of the first ferry boat, which carried people from the Montreal Island to Longueuil on the other side of the St. Lawrence.

After sixteen years of hard work, and of appeals made in all quarters, the Hospital was comparatively prosperous, when a fire broke out on



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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May 18, 1765. In a little while the whole building was consumed, and 118 persons were left without even a roof to shelter them. Amid the ruins, the pious Foundress said, "My children, let us kneel down and recite the *Te Deum*, to give thanks to God for sending us this cross." When she rose to her feet, she said, as if inspired, "Be of good heart, it will never burn again." Her words have remained true till the present hour.

Divine Providence deigned to reward, in seemingly miraculous ways, the filial resignation and trust of his servants. A much needed cask of wine, found beneath the rubbish of the building, lasted beyond all human calculation, and the Foundress laid her hands upon sums of money of whose presence she could give no account. "Oh, what a wretched creature I am," she said in deepest humility, at beholding such clear evidences of the Divine favour."

The sick, under the care of the Sisters, were not abandoned for a single day, in spite of all the difficulty and destitution. And though these sick persons were numerous, the devoted Grey Nuns were foremost in self-sacrificing work for others also, in times of public calamity. In 1755, the Foundress and her Sisters, at the risk of their lives, nursed the Indians through an attack of smallpox. Her example was followed by the Grey Nuns in 1832,

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## MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK

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when the cholera was raging. In 1847, when eleven hundred Irish emigrants were crowded together in the typhus sheds at Point St. Charles, Montreal, Mother MacMullen appealed to her thirty-seven Sisters for volunteers to go amongst them. Everyone said, "I will go." They went—the professed nuns and the novices. All caught the fever except three. Seven of them died of it, like the emigrants themselves. But they said they were happy to suffer something for the poor.

In a little Historical Catechism published in 1901, and approved by Mgr. Bruchesi, Archbishop of Montreal, we find the following mention of some charitable works in Mother d'Youville's own lifetime. "Besides the sick, and aged men, and orphan boys, whose care she accepted when taking charge of the General Hospital, Mother d'Youville provided also for aged and infirm women and orphan girls. She gave shelter to incurable cases—cases of leprosy, cancer, epilepsy, and other repulsive diseases, as well as of mental disease. In 1750 she opened a House of Refuge for fallen women, thus beginning in Canada what is so justly called the work of the Good Shepherd. In 1754 she began to take in children deserted by their kindred (*les enfants trouvés*), being the first person in America whom God inspired to undertake this charitable work without any payment from public or private

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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funds. In 1755 she gave a home to poor pock-marked women, and cared for them in her own house. In 1756 the sick and wounded prisoners of war were nursed in the General Hospital."

More surprising than this incomplete list is the general principle laid down by the Foundress, and accepted as their sublime motto by the Grey Nuns. Her exact words were: "The Sisters will be ever ready to undertake all manner of good works, which may be placed before them by Divine Providence, and approved by Superiors." These were her spoken words, and in agreement with them were the sentences which she wrote down only a year before her death. Age and lifelong labour account for the trembling hand in which Mother d'Youville wrote thus: "We are eighteen Sisters, all in feeble health, and we have charge of an establishment in which there are 170 persons to be fed, and almost as many to be clothed. Our resources are very slender. We depend chiefly on the work of our hands, which brings us only a third of what we were able to gain before the English came. We seem always on the point of starvation, yet somehow our necessities, at least, are always provided for. Day by day I admire how Divine Providence vouchsafes to make use of His poor servants in doing some little good."

The parting recommendation of this venerated



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## MADAME D'YOUVILLE AND HER WORK

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Foundress, and what is looked upon as her last Will and Testament, may be found in the following words which occupy the place of honour in the community room of every convent of the Grey Nuns:

MY DEAR SISTERS, REMAIN ALWAYS FAITHFUL TO THE HOLY STATE WHICH YOU HAVE CHOSEN; TAKE CARE NOT TO FAIL IN THE PRACTICE OF REGULARITY, OBEDIENCE, AND MORTIFICATION; ABOVE ALL THINGS, BE SO UNITED THAT YOU WILL SEEM TO HAVE BUT ONE HEART AND ONE SOUL.

She said also, "How happy I should be, if I were in Heaven, and all my Sisters with me!" In fact, her career was closing. She died of apoplexy on December 23, 1771, aged 70 years.

It was remarked that her drawn and wasted features quite changed when her long sufferings were over: she looked quite radiant, and as if in renewed health. Several reliable persons declared also that, at the moment of her death, they saw a Cross of light shining over the Hospital. It was seen by the learned M. Delisle.\* He did not know of the passing of the Foundress, and he exclaimed, "Oh, what Cross is visiting the poor Grey Nuns! What is going to happen them?"

What really happened was that the Foundress

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\*Note.—Mr. Delisle, one of the principal citizens of Ville-Marie, very well known in Canada among men of letters for his knowledge of natural sciences.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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in Heaven obtained from the Heavenly Father a most abundant blessing upon the works in which she had toiled not sparingly, the high tree which she had planted, and her holy life and labours had fertilized.

Not only so: the parent tree sent out also vigorous branches, so that, beside the Institute with which we are particularly concerned here (i.e., the *Sisters of Charity of the General Hospital of Montreal*), there are also in Canada the *Sisters of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu of St. Hyacinthe*, St. Hyacinthe (1840); the *Sisters of Charity, Grey Nuns of the Cross*, Ottawa (1845); the *Sisters of Charity of Quebec*, Quebec (1849); and another offshoot of the St. Hyacinthe branch, called the *Sisters of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu of Nicolet*, Nicolet (1886).

The first Mother House, Mother d'Youville's own foundation, has its branch houses now spread abroad from the Atlantic to the Arctic Ocean (See Appendix).

And the Cause of Beatification of the Venerable Foundress was at length in our day introduced before the Roman tribunals, Pope Leo XIII having signed, on March 27, 1890, the formal document preparing for the Beatification "of this valiant woman, who was all on fire with zeal and charity in the service of the poor."

## CHAPTER II.

### "STEPPING WESTWARD"

#### *The Red River (1844)*

ON September 13, 1843, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, a tall ecclesiastic, wearing a "threadbare cassock," and in his humble and pious appearance seeming the very picture of missionary zeal, knocked at the door of the Grey Nuns of Montreal. It was Mgr. Provencher, the first\* missionary of the Northwest, and first Bishop of the Red River, or St. Boniface. For twenty years he had been seeking in vain for motherly hands to break the bread of instruction for the little ones of his diocese. In 1822, he had consulted Mgr.

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\*We call him first, because he was the first to fix his residence there. The Jesuit Fathers in the 18th century did little more than pass through. They had little chance of exercising their ministry outside the French Forts. These courageous missionaries who, between 1732 and 1751, succeeded one another at Fort St. Charles and Fort La Reine (Portage la Prairie) were Fr. Massaiger, Fr. Aulneau (Killed by the Sioux on the *Ile aux Massacres*), Fr. Coquart, and Fr. de la Morinie. After them, there was no priest in the West for sixty-five years. In 1816, Abbé Tabeau reached Lac la Pluie (Rainy Lake), but hearing of a sort of battle which had taken place on June 19, in which many men had been killed by Indians and half-breeds, he returned immediately to the East. MM. Provencher and Dumoulin reached the Red River on July 16, 1818. See "Hist. of Cath. Church in Western Canada" by Fr. Morice, O.M.I. 2 vols. Toronto: Musson, 1910.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Plessis, Bishop of Quebec, his consecrator. But they had both come to the conclusion that the privations to be faced in a land so far away made it impossible to expect help from any community of women. Later on, application was made, without result, to the Bishop of Amiens, and the Lyons Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In 1838, the Ursulines of Three Rivers were so touched by the poor Bishop's account of the need of a Catholic school that they offered to go to him. But they were cloistered nuns, and how could they be cloistered in the boundless prairies of the West? Appeal was made to the Sisters of the Cross in Kentucky. They were too few in number. The Sisters of St. Joseph in Lyons were also unable to accept. Some Belgian nuns in Cincinnati promised to refer the matter to their Mother House in Namur.

Bishop Provencher was worn out with his failures in the Old World and the New, when someone said—what had often been said in the lifetime of Mother d'Youville—"Try the Grey Nuns; they never refuse." The missionary prelate consulted Mgr. Bourget, the saintly Bishop of Montreal, who encouraged him to go, and went with him to the Convent. To the assembled community of thirty-eight nuns, Mgr. Provencher said: "When leaving the Red River, I said, 'O, my God, you know my need of the help of nuns. Vouchsafe to

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## "STEPPING WESTWARD"

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lead my steps into some place where I can find them.' Then I set out in confidence that my prayer would be heard. Would any of you be willing to come to the Red River?"

At first the Sisters made no answer. But when Mother Forbes-MacMullen, who had been elected Mother-General a couple of weeks earlier, spoke, and asked if they were willing to make the sacrifice, every one of them expressed her willingness to go. Four were chosen: Sister Valade (Mother Superior), Sister Lagrave, Sister Coutlée (also known as Sister St. Joseph), and Sister Lafrance. They set out on April 24, 1844.

\* It is not easy at the present time to realize the meaning of that journey into the Great Lone Land in 1844. In our day, the traveller may be whirled, in a Pullman car, from Montreal to Winnipeg, from Winnipeg to Edmonton, from Edmonton to Athabaska Landing, and even now to MacMurray. Such a traveller has no idea of the anxieties, the inconveniences, the humiliations, the disappointments, the accidents and injuries by flood and field, the sufferings of all sorts, and the many tears, of those who passed of old through the rivers, the rapids, the immense and silent prairies, the woods, and the mountains, which are now simply a feast for his eyes. The modern tourist covers in

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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four days the 2,200 miles, which took four months in the olden times.

The life of the wood and the prairie has some attractions, no doubt, for the Indian and the *Coureur des bois*, who are equally at home at every point of the horizon. Yet even for them it is a hard life. What must it be for the Priest, who had been accustomed to his books, his prayers, and his quiet times of retreat! And what for the young Nun, who has just left her mother's care, or the happy toil and delightful companionship of the novitiate, and whose journeys may have been only between her chapel and the sick room of some patient!

Travelling into the Northwest in primitive fashion means a frail and inconvenient canoe, with a crew not over-civilized, shooting some rapids, endless portages elsewhere, rude carts on rough roads, slow and stubborn oxen, forced marches, treacherous quagmires, nights in the open air, piercing wind and rain, ice that comes too soon, and thaw that comes too late, snow-storm and wreck, unbearable cold, and then millions of mosquitoes, with heat as if of the dog-days. We may imagine the Crucified Lord, who gives vocations, saying to some one in sight of such a prospect, "Daughter, can you drink of my chalice?" Many a Sister of Charity has answered, "Yea, Lord, with Thy grace I can: my heart is ready."



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## "STEPPING WESTWARD"

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Master, lead on, and I will follow Thee,  
To the last gasp, in faith and loyalty.

The Grey Nuns who were called and led, and who so loyally answered the call, were needed to help in saving souls for which Christ died. But how uninviting the visible envelope that hides those precious souls! The Indians may indeed be upright and simple-minded, but their ways and their notions are not as ours. To the civilized world they are only "savages." The Sister of Charity going to live among them knew all this. She knew that she was bidding farewell for ever to all that her heart held most dear. She knew also that she would have to be content with the shelter of a hut, and with food which could not be offered to criminals in penal servitude. She knew that when her work was done she would die far away from home and native land, and from that dear Mother House, the cradle of her religious life, to which she was bound by so many cords of love. She knew that she would be buried in the frozen earth, where at night the wild beasts still run to and fro. Did she hesitate to accept that "chalice?" No. no! In 1844, the first Grey Nuns were seen "stepping westward," with a smile upon their lips, as if going to a bridal feast. Since then, hundreds of others have followed, and we may be sure that as long as there are souls in need, Sisters of Charity will be found to serve them.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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We have been keeping a Mackenzie Golden Jubilee, and we naturally ask ourselves what a Bishop in the Mackenzie territory is likely to have to report at the end of another half-century. Civilization is making its way by leaps and bounds towards the north and the west. Perhaps even before 1967, there will be written about those utter-



VISITING THE POOR. IN THE FAR NORTH.

most bounds of the Canadian Dominion what is written now concerning Regina, Edmonton, and Calgary, places which, fifty years ago, were thought destined for all time to be the haunts of the buffalo. Perhaps from the vast prairies the railroads will have been carried further still, piercing



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## “STEPPING WESTWARD”

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the virgin forests, and skirting the banks of the broad rivers. Perhaps round about Lake Athabaska, Great Slave Lake, and Great Bear Lake, adventurous men will be taking from the frost-bound earth some portion of the treasures which it contains of coal and oil, of iron and copper and silver. Perhaps with such progress there will not be poverty, and instead of smoky log-cabins, there will be palatial schools, and magnificent hospitals. Perhaps the stories of the privations and perils of missionary priests and nuns, and other “old-timers,” will seem like fairy tales. Who knows? It is not for us either to desire or to regret. Perhaps, where civilization of a sort comes, without religion, there may be for the representatives of religion, moral sufferings not easier to endure than the physical sufferings to be met with in converting poor primitive races, not too corrupt.

At all events, even when the Palefaces advance, there will still be the Arctic circle and the barren grounds of the Eskimo. But of one thing we are sure: the missionaries even of the Arctic Ocean shore will not be more heroic than the first missionary Sisters of the Red River, or those of Mackenzie in our own day.

As we have said, April 24, 1844, was the day to bid good-bye to Montreal. The last prayers were said before the Lady Altar in the Cathedral, where

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Mgr. Bourget gave his blessing to the little caravan. It happened, for the special trial of the Sisters, that Mgr. Provencher, through illness, was unable to accompany them, and so those pioneers were left without the help and consolation of which very few of their successors have been deprived. The Hudson Bay Company's boats, which sent up stores every year from Montreal, took passengers also. A number of birch-bark canoes formed a regular flotilla. The canoe assigned to the nuns was forty feet in length, and five in breadth. It had eight oarsmen. It carried a cargo of 4,000 lb. in weight, without counting the sails, tents, bedding, provisions, kitchen utensils, etc. The Sisters made room for themselves as best they could amid the boxes and bales. The canoe was to be to them "all the world for cell," during two long months.

Their course was by the Ottawa river (from Lachine, near Montreal) the Mattawa, the Vase river, Lake Nipissing, the French river, Lake Huron, Lake Superior (at Fort William they had the happiness of seeing Abbe Laflèche afterwards Bishop, and Abbé Bourassa), the Kaministiquia river, Rainy Lake, the Lake of the Woods, the Winnipeg river, and several streams of less importance. It was a journey of 1,400 miles, in which were encountered more than fifty rapids, eighty portages,

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## “STEPPING WESTWARD”

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and almost as many other interruptions not considered worth calling portages. A *portage* means the carrying of the boats and their contents from one lake or river to another, or from one part of a river to the next navigable part. The distances vary, but the work is always very hard. Each man carries about 200 lb. weight, the boatmen carry the canoe, and the passengers their own luggage. Mud, rocks, fallen trees, trees that have been felled, are among the troubles to be met with in a portage. In the hot weather, the panting and perspiring passenger is assailed by clouds of insects, thirsting for his blood, and drawing it! It must be remembered also that in 1844 travellers to the Red River passed through the countries of Indian tribes still uncivilized and pagan, and some of them, such as the Sioux, very fierce. The only signs of civilization were the crosses marking the graves of pioneers who had perished prematurely.

We have had the advantage of seeing the diary which was kept by the Grey Nuns during that voyage of theirs to the West. Sister Valade wrote before they had gone very far: “At Dorval Island, we were still rather near, and we slept fairly well. But in the morning, when we had to go on again, my poor heart failed me. The passengers were singing in order not to be sad. I could not help admiring the courage of Sister Lagrave, who sang

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the hymn, *Bénissons à jamais le Seigneur pour ses bienfaits*. For my part, it was only with my tears that I could bless the Lord."

On May 2, Sister Lagrave herself wrote: "what can I say? I think the great gale over Lake Huron blows all my ideas away. I am sitting on a rock trying to collect a few, while my head is dizzy, and my heart is beating very fast. The voyage is still more trying even than I expected. But God will enable me to bear up even to the end. Sister Valade and I have hardly slept since we set out. The two younger Sisters are getting on much better. We have had bad weather nearly all the time, and, when the rain stops, the wind is nearly always against us. When we land, to camp out, we are soaking with rain, or shivering with cold. We make a good fire; but we burn on one side, and freeze on the other. When the tent is up, we spread an oilcloth on the ground, and a blanket upon that, and so the bed is made. You can understand that it is not a very comfortable bed, especially if there has been a downpour all day. When the rain continues during the night, the tent is not of much use, and our clothes are wringing wet. In spite of everything, I have courage enough to carry out God's holy will, even though it should cost me more. I have embraced the Cross as my portion, and I mean to cling to it, even until death, in the

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## “STEPPING WESTWARD”

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spirit of our Holy Rule. On the rocks on which we have pitched our tents to-day, there are many serpents. The men have killed four. Yesterday we had to shoot several dangerous rapids. The boatmen shouted with delight going down. I, too, enjoyed the novelty. The other Sisters were pale with terror. Thank God, we have had no accident so far. The portages are long and fatiguing, especially for me. Climbing mountains is no easy matter, nor is it easy to make a way for yourself through overhanging branches, and to pass over a ravine on a half-rotten tree.”

Alas! the accident was not long in coming. Sister Valade takes up the pen at this point: “Since the foregoing lines were written, Sister Lagrave has sprained her ankle by slipping on a rock. She had to be carried to the canoe by two men. I fear she will not be able to walk for a long time, and there are portages still before us. God Almighty sends us plenty of crosses: blessed be His Holy Name!” It was indeed a great trial. How was a person to be brought through woods and morasses, who had to be carried by two men? It was no wonder that the chief man of the company at Fort William decided that she must be left behind. But he allowed himself to be persuaded to reverse his decision, and two sturdy Iroquois were hired to take charge of the sufferer. Sister Valade wrote:



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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"What a torture it has been, not only for Sister Lagrave herself, but for me also! I could not eat or drink until the matter was settled according to our wishes."

The four Grey Nuns reached the Red River at St. Boniface on June 21, 1844, after a continuous journey of fifty-nine days. Their assigned lodging was a little house, built in 1828. "It is indeed the stable of Bethlehem," they wrote.

They began to teach school on July 11. They had from the very beginning fifty-four pupils, mostly Sauteux or Half-Breeds, and some Sioux.

During their first winter at St. Boniface, the thermometer inside their house marked 40 degrees Fahr. (72 degrees below freezing point). Mgr. Provencher, then again at home, gave them shelter in his own house, though they had made no complaint. "The Bishop's house was not quite so cold," they wrote.

At St. Boniface Sister Lagrave gave religious instruction outside the Convent. All through the winter, driving a little conveyance of her own, she went distances of several miles, to teach the catechism and prayers to children, and women, and men, all of whom eagerly welcomed her instructions. She also acted as the physician of all the neighbourhood.

As we must pass away from St. Boniface, we

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## “STEPPING WESTWARD”

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can do no more now than make mention of the great flood of 1852, and only in so far as it affected and afflicted the nuns themselves in particular. One of them wrote: “Our community had just begun to feel very much at home in our new house—which was finished last year—when, on April 27, the sudden flood struck terror into all hearts. For several days the waters kept rising, reaching even fourteen or fifteen feet. The inhabitants abandoned their homes to the fury of the flood, which continued until May 19 to sweep away all sorts of constructions, and even solid houses. Of course, we had to leave the ground floor. Our chapel, too, was full of water, and Mass was said in the gallery. In the night of May 12-13 there was a great wind which made the whole house rock. On the 18th our doors were at last thrown down. It was only on June 6 that we were able to set foot outside the house.”

In 1861 St. Boniface was again flooded, and it was then, on May 13th, that Sister Valade died. “There was not even a foot of dry ground to receive her mortal remains.” The body of Sister Valade was temporarily laid to rest near that of Mgr. Provencher, in the ruins of the Cathedral, which had been burnt to the ground five months before. Mgr. Taché, and his assistants, and those who carried the coffin, had to walk and stand in water knee-deep.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Surely we may say that the St. Boniface Convent bore sufficient mark of the Cross. The Venerable Mother d'Youville had given it her blessing from on high. It was destined to live and prosper. In matter of fact, it has developed into a Provincial House, with seventeen other convents attached thereto, and 244 religious.

## CHAPTER III.

### FURTHER WEST AND NORTH.

*Lake St. Anne; St. Albert; Ile à la Crosse; Lac La Biche (1859-62)*

WITH Grey Nuns at the Red River, true Sisters of the Charity of God, in charge of the dearest portion of his flock, viz., the young, the infirm, and the unfriended; and then with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate coming into the field to assist the secular clergy,\* good Bishop Provencher must have thought that his dream was realized, and that he might sing his *Nunc dimittis*. On June 7, 1853, the holy prelate did depart in peace to his heavenly recompense, leaving to his young Coadjutor, Bishop Taché, O.M.I., the rich inherit-

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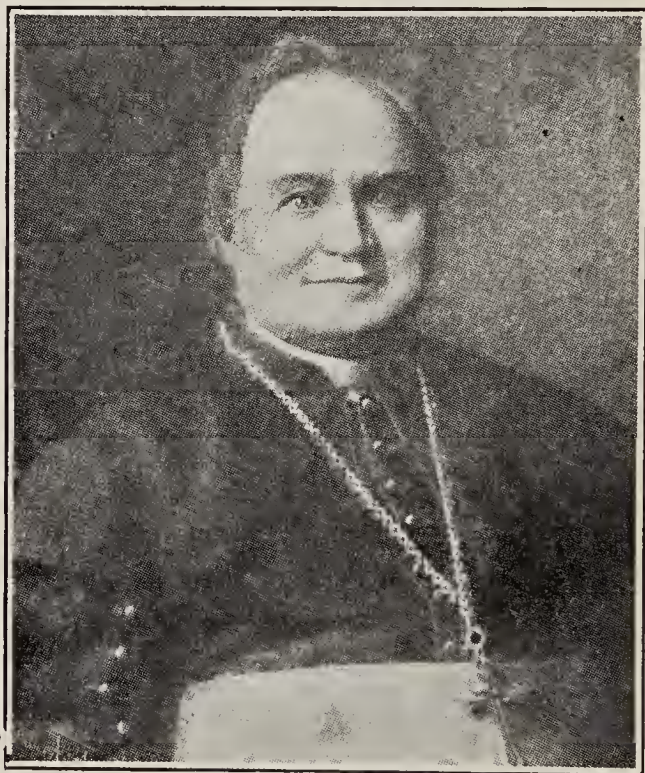
\*These devoted Priests, Coming from Eastern Canada in answer to appeals from Mgr. Provencher, were the first to earn the name of Apostles of the Northwest. Worthy of special Mention are M. Bourassa, who penetrated even as far as the Peace River; M. Thibault in the modern Alberta and Saskatchewan, who in 1845, at La Loche Portage, baptized the first Christians of the Montagnais tribe; M. Belcourt in Manitoba; M. Lafleche at Ile à la Crosse (Saskatchewan); and M. Darveau, called the martyr of Lake Winnipegosis. Those worthy priests were in no way wanting in the spirit of poverty or of obedience, but in that terribly trying mission field, Bishop Provencher deeply felt the need of a regular society, as the best guarantee of numbers, unity and continuity. He succeeded in bringing the first Oblates to the Red River in 1845, one year after the Grey Nuns.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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ance of his thirty-five years of apostolic labours, thirty-one of them in the episcopate. The aged prelate had the consolation of thinking on his



Mgr. A. TACHÉ, O.M.I.,

Successor to Mgr. Provencher, and first Archbishop of Saint-Boniface. His jurisdiction extended in the West as far as the Rocky Mountains, and in the North to the Arctic Ocean, until the year 1862.

death-bed that the future of religion in his diocese had been made secure.

Mgr. Taché, when the news reached him, was

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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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far away at La Loche Portage. From there he wrote to the Nuns at St. Boniface: "It is a terrible blow. It will be long before any of us can cease to feel it deeply. You, my dear Sisters, are indeed orphans, such was the paternal affection in your regard of the Bishop for whom your tears flow. His successor does not possess his virtues; but he does inherit his kindness of heart, as far as you are concerned, and his gratitude for all the good that you are doing in this diocese. Indeed, it is to you, dear Sisters, that I look for some of the consolation which may make bearable the burden and anxiety that must weigh upon the chief pastor. It is to you that God Himself looks for still more good that remains to be done in the interests of religion."

The letter sounded like a new word of command, telling the Nuns that they ought to be ready to go still further afield. Let it be remembered that at this date, and until 1862, the Red River, though so far distant from Quebec or Toronto, was only the threshold of a diocese which reached to the Rocky Mountains and the Polar Sea. There was but one Bishop in that vast expanse of 1,800,000 square miles.

In 1858, the northern portion of this diocese of St. Boniface had five fixed missionary posts. From these central stations, Bishop Taché, and Fathers Grandin, Grollier, Faraud, Lacombe, Végreville,

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Clut, Eynard, Tissot, Maisonneuve, Rémas and Gascon, O.M.I., travelled and trudged in all directions, making disciples of Christ among the Red men, even up to the Arctic Circle.\* But these missionaries, few in numbers, and worn out by their long journeys and by the manual labour which provided them with such food and shelter as contented them, these overburdened missionary priests felt more and more, day by day, their absolute need of those who would give continuous and detailed religious instruction, especially to the children. There were, at Lake St. Anne, Ile à la Crosse and Lac la Biche, Indians and Half-Breeds numerous enough to require the care of the Grey Nuns. Bishop Taché, therefore, betook himself to their Mother House at Montreal.

Mother Deschamps, the Superior General, was a lady of quick intelligence and lively faith. Her conference with the Bishop was described as forc-

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\*The Central Missions were:—1. *Lake St Anne* (formerly Devil's Lake), from which the Saskatchewan, Upper Athabaska, and Peace Rivers were visited. 2. *Lac la Biche*, from which Fort Pitt and other places were served. 3. *Ile à la Crosse*, on which Green Lake, La Loche Portage, and Caribou (or Reindeer) Lake depended. 4. *Fort Chipewyan* (Nativity), on Lake Athabaska, with Fond du Lac (Seven Dolours). It was from the Nativity Mission that Father Faraud went to convert the Castors of Vermilion and Dunvegan. 5. *Fort Resolution* (St. Joseph), on Great Slave Lake, from which Father Grollier, visited very northerly posts. He founded the missions of Big Island (Grande-Ile), Fort Simpson and Good Hope.



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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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ing one to think of the Mother of the Maccabees, or a warm-hearted General sending out a forlorn hope. A contract was drawn up. The nuns would be found, at whatever cost. The Bishop would be responsible for their spiritual interests, and would help them in the observance of their Rule. As for maintenance, Mgr. Taché felt bound to say that the missionaries were all very poor; that they could promise very little, and indeed could hardly promise anything for certain. "We are quite sure," said the Mother General, "the Fathers will not see our Sisters starve: we ask only food and clothing." "Sometimes," said the Bishop, "the Fathers themselves have not enough to eat." "Well," said the Reverend Mother, "in that case our Sisters too will fast, and will pray God to come to the help of both communities."

*Lake St. Anne and St. Albert.*—On September 24, 1859, Sisters Emery, Lamy, and Alphonsus arrived at Lake St. Anne. In 1863, they were transferred to St. Albert. The Half-Breeds were numerous at Lake St. Anne, but the ground thereabouts was boggy, and not very suitable for cultivation, and, besides, it was too far from the Black-foot Indians, who at that time were coming into the Church. Being at Lake St. Anne in 1860, Mgr. Taché, one day, bound on his snow-shoes and set off

THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH



THE PRESENT COMMUNITY OF ST. ALBERT.



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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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with Father Lacombe to look for a better site. Forty miles east of the lake, he planted his staff in the snow, on a rising ground above the Sturgeon River, and said, "Let the new Mission be here." And he called it after Father Lacombe's Patron, Saint Albert.

*Ile à la Crosse.*—On October 4, 1860, Mgr. Grandin, who had just been consecrated as assistant Bishop to Mgr. Taché, arrived at Ile à la Crosse with a new and valiant company of "the Greys." These were Sisters Agnes, Pépin and Boucher. These foundresses of yet another convent have left it on record that they reached Ile à la Crosse after "a voyage of sixty-three days, by river and by lake, having met with an exceptionally great number of disappointments and difficulties\* and accidents of all sorts."

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\*A few lines written in later times by Mother Letellier, the Reverend Mother at St. Albert, also gives us some idea of the "difficulties" of the land route from the east to Ile à La Crosse. Mother Letellier, writing on June 21, 1898, from Green Lake, which (like Ile à la Crosse) is in North Saskatchewan, said: "We have arrived safe and sound, thank God, after some remarkable experiences. The jolting on the so-called roads was something dreadful. It really threatened to shake one all to pieces. Add to this our sleepless nights, when we could only listen to the rain beating upon our tent, or try to defend ourselves against an army of mosquitoes and other insects. What an introduction into missionary life for our devoted Sisters! And for one who comes to visit these dear exiles, how the heart is stirred with sympathy and admiration!"

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Along with the Nuns in their first journey to Ile à la Crosse in 1860, under the care of Bishop Grandin, was young Father Séguin, O.M.I., who was about to begin his missionary career of forty-one years at Fort Good Hope, near the Arctic Circle. He mentioned in a letter to Mgr. de Mazenod, the venerated Founder of the Oblates, that in their long journey from St. Boniface, with thirty-seven portages between the lakes, they had twice escaped from what seemed certain death. He told also how at Grand Diable rapid their little cable had snapped, and the boat, capsizing, was cast away in the midst of inaccessible rocks. How it happened, he went on to say, that, after the Bishop's Mass on the riverside, the boat righted itself, and was floated within their reach, was what nobody could ever explain. Father Séguin, in the same letter, wrote also: "There were sixty bales or packages in our boat. This is the ordinary cargo. Into the bargain, we were twenty-six persons in all, so that our bark drew very much water. You may imagine how overcrowded the passengers were. The rowers could hardly find room to ply their oars. The three Sisters were huddled together in a corner, along with a squaw, who, from time to time, partook with pleasure of the vermin which she found upon herself or her disgustingly dirty children. All the Indians in this boat were covered with ver-

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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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min, and in a very little time every one of us was in the same condition.

"Twice our men, when dragging the boat through rapids, were swept off their feet by the current. Two of them were hurt rather seriously, but the Sisters, being experienced nurses, were of great service to them.

"In the portages we had often to make our way over fallen trees, and through thorns and briars, which not only tore our clothes, but left us with bleeding faces and hands. It was raining every day, and sometimes, as we walked, we were up to the knees in water and mud. In camping out, we occasionally had to imitate somewhat the lake-dwellers of old, so as to be able to sleep in dry quarters. But, in spite of our hardships, we were all in good spirits. We were always ready to laugh, even if at night some one woke his neighbours by slipping off his planks into the muddy water, and declaring it was awfully cold."

The famous *coureur des bois*, Vincent, who guided so many of the Grey Nuns in northern journeys, once told Father A. Watelle, at Ile à la Crosse, a little story which is worth repeating here. He was bringing one of the nuns from Ile à la Crosse in a birch-bark canoe. An Indian was at the prow; the nun, with a little girl, in the middle; and Vincent at the helm. "We were going down

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the rapid, Father," said Vincent, "and it was a terrible one. The canoe was dancing. At every greater leap it made, the Sister evidently wanted to stand up, and jump out on the rocks. I begged her to be quiet or we were all lost. The more I spoke, the more nervous she became, catching first one side of the canoe and then the other. Yet the Grey Sisters are well used to be brave. They know how to travel. But this Sister was crying. Just as we were coming to the most dangerous spot, I remembered something that I had heard forty years before, at Sorel, in the Province of Quebec, and I shouted, 'Sister, in virtue of obedience, I order you to keep quiet.' I assure you, Father, it was like a knock-down blow. She lay in the bottom of the canoe, and never stirred hand or foot, and so, thank God, we came safe through."

The Convent of Ile à la Crosse, though it did not suffer so much as others from famine, yet passed through many and greater trials. On March 1, 1867, it was totally destroyed by fire. Sir William Butler has written some memorable pages about what he heard, and what he saw with his own eyes in those remote places of the Wild North Land. The Bishop of St. Albert, Mgr. Grandin wrote concerning the destruction of March 1, 1867: "We had to stand helpless on the frozen lake, in view of that fiery furnace, which was destroying

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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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the fruit of years of labour and self-sacrifice. The heat had melted the snow, so that we were standing in water, and not one of us had another stocking or shoe. Nothing whatever had been spared, not even a handkerchief to wipe away our tears."

After the fire came the flood. From east and west and south the waters pour into the Lake at Ile à la Crosse. In the course of years it came to pass that they rose higher and higher every spring, gaining more and more upon the Mission premises. A site, which in the beginning had been far above the level of safety, became in course of time actually lower than the level of the lake in flood. The new Orphanage, which sprang up from the ashes of the old, had now to be abandoned. In 1905 the ten Sisters of the community went away in tears, whilst the Indians, on their part, besought them not to abandon themselves and their children, and tried forcibly to prevent their departure.

In 1909, Bishop Pascal, O.M.I., of Prince Albert, wrote beseechingly to the Mother General: "The other nuns who came were not able to stay, where your Sisters lived for fifty years under less favorable conditions. God Almighty seems to be telling us that the Grey Nuns of Montreal are *par excellence* the predestined Missionary Sisters of this Northwest, and that they alone are capable of filling posts demanding such self-sacrifice. In



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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every likely quarter, Father Grandin and I have used all our powers of persuasion—in vain. No community is willing to accept. Dear Reverend Mother, I appeal to you once more. The Indians remain inconsolable since the Nuns went. Your Sisters in the little cemetery here are calling you to come back and live and labour where they laboured and died.”

With what feelings the letter was read we are not told. But this appeal was not in vain, though it invited to heroic acts. The Grey Nuns returned to the neighbourhood of Ile à la Crosse. “This Mission, so dear to us,” one of them wrote, “is ours once more, to everyone’s astonishment and edification, but at what a cost to us!” Another site, however, was found thirty-five miles to the south, and the new convent, the successor and heir—of sacrifices—to the historic Ile à la Crosse, is called the Convent of our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Beauval, Lac la Plonge, Saskatchewan.

Moreover, it was found possible in 1917 to establish a second Convent at Ile à la Crosse itself.

*Lac La Biche.*—The third foundation, of which we have to make mention here, was that of Lac La Biche, in Alberta, 500 miles north from St. Boniface. Sisters Guénette, Daunais and Tisseur arrived there on August 26, 1862, after a journey of forty-nine days through the prairie.

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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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Lac La Biche was for long a centre for the Northern Missions, and after a time it became almost prosperous, but only through long and laborious efforts, in which the Sisters had a large share. Mother Charlebois, paying an official visit to their Convent in 1880, wrote as follows:—"These dear Sisters have aged very much. Their house is unhealthy. Their wonderful industry has, however, made many improvements. I found several cupboards of very curious shapes, but really serviceable all the same. Some of them have been made by the Sisters themselves out of the boxes, in which we send them supplies from time to time. I said to the Sisters that they were scrupulously economical. One of them assured me gaily that poverty is the surest economy. When I went into the scullery, a miserable shed letting in all the winds of heaven, an exclamation of surprise and sorrow escaped me. But the Sisters only laughed. They said, 'Oh, Mother dear, you should have been an old-timer: we are in the lap of luxury nowadays'. I said nothing in order not to betray my feelings."

In 1898, the Sisters removed from Lac la Biche to Saddle Lake (also in Alberta) in order to be near the Indians, whose children they were teaching, and to leave no excuse for not sending the children to their school. At present, there is an excellent Indian Industrial School at Saddle Lake.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Mother St. Grégoire is at the head of the teaching staff, and Father Husson, O.M.I. is the Principal.

The Convent of Lac La Biche has passed into the hands of *Les Filles de Jesus*, of Kermaria in Brittany. They teach the children of the numerous settlers in their neighborhood.\*

At the time of these several foundations, the country round Lake St. Anne, Lac la Biche, and (in part) Ile à la Crosse, formed the hunting grounds of the Crees, a tribe which, like the Sauteux and the Maskegons, is a branch of the great Algonquin race. There has been since then a great deal of immigration of the Palefaces, who, however have not sought to injure the pros-

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\*Their congregation, founded by Abbé Noury and Mother St. Angela, undertakes both school work, and hospital work. Until 1902, all the Sisters were Bretons, but they spread into several European countries, and since 1902 they have Canadian and other nuns amongst them. They have houses in seven dioceses in Canada and the United States, and they are about 2,000 in number. These Nuns of Kermaria were first brought to America by Mgr. Legal, O.M.I., at the suggestion of Father Jan, O.M.I. Their first home was in the Bishop's house at St. Albert, near the Convent of the Grey Nuns, who received them with open arms, and helped them to become acclimatized. They themselves wrote: "At St. Albert the Grey Nuns are sisters indeed to us. There is no feast in d'Youville Convent to which we are not invited. So we are not treated as strangers in the Canadian West." When these good nuns of Kermaria settled at Lac La Biche, they, like their predecessors, suffered cheerfully, for the love of God and of the poor, the many privations inseparable from their position.

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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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pects of the Indians. Treaties have been made between the Government of Canada and the Indians, by which, along with certain privileges, exclusive rights of hunting, fishing, etc., are acknowledged to belong to the Indians within their own reserves.

The Crees, especially those of the Prairies, in regard of whom the Grey Nuns of 1850 had to exercise their zeal were thus described by the late Bishop Laflèche, who had been the missionary of Ile à la Crosse: "The Prairie Indians, that is, the Blackfeet, the Assiniboinés, the Crees, and in considerable numbers the Sauteux, are an abject race. I think it no exaggeration to say that in them we find the very lowest type of humanity. Their degradation and wickedness is the result of their mode of life. They are mostly in large camps of sixty or eighty, or more, wigwams. They lead an idle and wandering life, following the buffalo, which supplies them abundantly with food and clothing. After seeing the disgusting lives of those savages, one easily concludes that work is a blessing, if also a penance, for fallen man. If the Prairie Tribes form a sink of iniquity; if robbery, and murder, and the most shocking immorality, are events of every day for most of them, it is because these barbarous beings usually lead an idle life."

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Abbé Thibault evidently shared this opinion. At a much earlier date, after an experience of some years among the Prairie Crees, he wrote to Bishop Provencher: "When the last buffalo is dead, it may be possible to do something for the Prairies."

Such a view seems to have been too gloomy. Robbery and murder and immorality are to be found elsewhere than among the Pagan Red Men. But the Religion of Christ has, always and everywhere, been able to raise up fallen human nature, to crucify its vices and concupiscences, putting to death its fruits of evil, and engrafting on the True Vine whatever is living and healthy in human nature purified and restored. The buffaloes were still plentiful, when the Crees, under the influence of divine grace, gave up, in numberless cases their shameful customs. They learned, too, to be gentle instead of quarrelsome. The sorceries of their "medicine men" were given up by all except a small and despised remnant. The Red Men learned to love their Black Robe. They followed his teachings, and became his joy and his crown, because standing fast in the Lord.

— All honour to the Grey Nuns who have had so large a share in civilizing and christianizing the Indians! Even their silent presence has been from the beginning a magnet, drawing away thoughts from everything unworthy and of ill-

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## FURTHER WEST AND NORTH

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repute. Here were women who must have been chosen daughters of the Great Spirit, women who were not slaves, nay, who were treated with particular respect by the Palefaces, by the Blackrobe, and by the great Prayer Chief himself! But the Nuns were by no means silent or inactive. Year after year they were the patient planters of the Gospel seed, in a soil not too ungrateful. They have, and they will have, their reward exceeding great.

St. Albert or Edmonton now forms for the Grey Nuns a separate province from St. Boniface. It is evidence of no small growth that this new province already counts seven Convents, and over one hundred nuns.\*

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\*The Grey Nuns are, since 1884, in charge of a flourishing Industrial School at Dunbow, for the Blackfeet, the Piegans, the Blood, Sarcee and Cree Indians.

Other communities of nuns have of late years come west, to share in the labours of Mother d'Youville's Grey Nuns. The *Sisters of the Assumption*, from Nicolet, came, at the request of Mgr. Grandin, to labour among certain Cree tribes in Alberta and Saskatchewan. They have charge of the schools at Onion Lake (1891), Hobbema (1894), St. Paul des Métis (1897), and Delmas (1900). This little Congregation was founded in 1853, with the blessing and zealous assistance of Abbé Harper, parish priest of Saint-Grégoire, an almost Acadian parish in Quebec Province. The Acadians (so dear to Longfellow) have a special devotion to the Assumption of our Blessed Lady. These Sisters of the Assumption, in their fifty-nine houses, have about 600 nuns.

Other helpers came to Alberta in 1893, viz., the *Grey Sisters of Nicolet*, who founded a hospital, and also a school, on the Blood Reserve, and a school on the Piegan Reserve.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Since 1903, the *Sisters of the Presentation* are in charge of a great Industrial School for the Crees, which is under the patronage of St. Michael, at Duck Lake, in the diocese of Prince Albert. These Presentation nuns, so highly esteemed in Eastern Canada, belong to a congregation founded in France, in 1796, by the Venerable Mother Rivier, for the education of girls. The Mother House remains from the beginning at Bourg-Saint-Andéol, in the diocese of Viviers. The first house in Canada was founded in 1853, at Sainte-Marie de Monnoir. On the Provincial House of St. Hyacinthe (1858) are dependent 34 convents in Canada, and 20 in the United States, with about 800 nuns, and 16,000 pupils.

*The Faithful Companions of Jesus* went out from England to the Northwest in 1883, at the request of Bishop Grandin. The Mother House of those Sisters is at Sainte-Anne d'Auray in Brittany. It was there that the Bishop, whose applications in other quarters had failed, was told, to his great joy and gratitude, "As it is a sacrifice your Lordship asks us to make, we accept." But it was especially for English schools that the Bishop was at that time trying to provide and therefore it was from the Boarding Schools in England which the Faithful Companions conduct with so much distinction and success, that were chosen the first members of that Order who went to the Canadian Northwest. Their work in what are now the dioceses of Edmonton and Calgary will bear comparison with the educational work of their convents at Upton Hall, Holt Hill, Dee House, and elsewhere in England.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

(1867)

HITHERTO the reader has been making acquaintance with the work of the Grey Nuns in territories which are very much north, as well as west, when compared with old or Eastern Canada. We have been naming places about the 55th degree of north latitude, and in those prairie provinces which, when carved out of the Wild North Land of General Butler, received the 60th degree for their northern boundary. But now we have to follow the Canadian Sisters of Charity still further north than even the 60th degree: to follow them into those still unorganized, and for the most part unexplored, territories, which contain Great Slave Lake, Great Bear Lake, and the Mackenzie River. It is the Far North, indeed, where, nevertheless, one who knows sees familiar names—Pius IX. Lake, Lake Taché, Lake Grandin, Lake Fabre—sees and understands.

The Grey Nuns had been working for twenty-three years at the Red River, and for six years still further north and west, when they were begged and prayed to come up higher. The separate



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Vicariate of Athabaska-Mackenzie, suffragan to Mgr. Taché, Archbishop of St. Boniface, was formed in 1862. Its first Bishop, Mgr. Faraud, in spite of enormous difficulties, established it on solid foundations. He was succeeded in 1891 by Mgr. Grouard. In 1901 Athabaska was made one Vicariate under Mgr. Grouard, O.M.I., and Mackenzie, another under Mgr. Breynat, O.M.I.

At the present time there remains one Convent of the Grey Nuns in Athabaska, and there are four in Mackenzie. These five form, since 1915, the religious province of Mackenzie. The Sisters began to settle down amid the icy mountains of the North in the early years of the Athabaska-Mackenzie Vicariate. Mgr. Faraud, O.M.I., at once appealed to them for help. Travelling is slow, and posts are infrequent in those regions, even nowadays. By 1866 the Nuns were ready to start. They had made the same agreement as with Mgr. Taché: "We will share the fate of the missionary priests; like them we will pray and labour, and, if so it must be, we will fast like them." They left Montreal on September 17, 1866. They reached Fort Providence, past Great Slave Lake, on August 28, 1867.

It was at that same place, the Providence Mission, in the heart of the Mackenzie country, that Father Grouard, who was to be the successor

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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of Mgr. Faraud, first heard that the Grey Nuns were coming so far north. This venerable Bishop lately told us frankly the impression made upon him by the news: "I said to myself, what hardihood! Providence! But we ought not to tempt Providence. How can those Sisters suddenly leave their Convent at Montreal and come into these desolate regions, to live among Indians whose conversion has only just begun? Will they ever arrive? We have known of explorers, Government officials, well supplied with all manner of provisions, who were so delayed that they had to eat the dogs which drew them. If the Sisters ever arrive, how will they be able to live through our terrible and long winters, without bread, without anything? We can sometimes snare or shoot a hare or a musk-rat. What will they do? So I said to myself. But the Sisters came. They managed to survive. And now they are keeping their Golden Jubilee at Providence! Surely Providence has watched over them in a most special way, and has blessed all their works, which are the works of Sisters of Charity indeed."

These words of the Bishop suggest to us what ought to be said in this chapter. In order to understand rightly what will afterwards be said about the various foundations of the Nuns, it is necessary first to know something about, (1) the

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP E. GROUARD,  
O.M.I., D.D.

Formerly Vicar Apostolic of Athabaska-Mackenzie. Since 1901, Vicar Apostolic of Athabaska.

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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Mackenzie country, (2) its Indian inhabitants, and (3) the dietary with which the Nuns had to be content at Fort Providence.

(1) "Few people—even Canadians—realize that the Dominion of Canada is bounded on the north by the Arctic Ocean: fewer still realize in the slightest degree what that means. Perhaps even it would be more correct to say that Canada is 'bounded' on the north by the North Pole.

"North of the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba there is a tremendous territory—extending from the 60th parallel to the Arctic Ocean and the islands thereof: Victoria, Banks, Prince of Wales, North Devon, Ellesmere, Melville, Baffin—'islands' in mere size comparable to, and some of them individually greater than the entire area comprised in the Maritime Provinces.

"These are the North-West Territories of Canada. East of the Rocky Mountains, all of this territory is on the Arctic or on the Hudson Bay slope. The Yukon territory (west of the mountains) drains into the North Pacific. The Mackenzie River (the great highway of the north) carries off to the Arctic the waters of Great Bear Lake, Great Slave Lake, Lake Athabaska, with tributary rivers rising as far south as the Yellow Head Pass, almost due west of Edmonton. The

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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mighty Peace River, rising in British Columbia, foaming through magnificent canyons, pierces the Rockies to pour its flood into the already splendid volume of Mackenzie (500,000 cubic feet per second). The drainage area of the Mackenzie and tributaries is estimated at 985,000 square miles. . . . Great Slave Lake is about equal in area to Ontario and Erie combined, and Great Bear Lake to Lake Huron, including the Georgian Bay.

"The Arctic Basin comprises 1,290,000 square miles. The Hudson Bay basin alone comprises 1,486,000 square miles. The entire Atlantic basin (of Canada), exclusive, of course, of Hudson Bay, only 554,000 square miles."\*

• The Mackenzie country, the most northerly inhabited part of the continent, a land eight times as large as Great Britain and Ireland; in which lakes and rivers are frozen for eight months of the year; where communication is made between forts† one hundred to two hundred miles distant from each other by lightly laden dog-sleds, was the land to which the brave Nuns exiled themselves.

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\*C. C. McCaul, K.C. *An Arctic Tragedy*. Chap. 2.

†The word *Fort*, still used in the North, has lost its old meaning. It now stands for the residence of the officers and men of the Fur Companies, the Mission, and some little houses or huts of Half-Breeds and Indians.

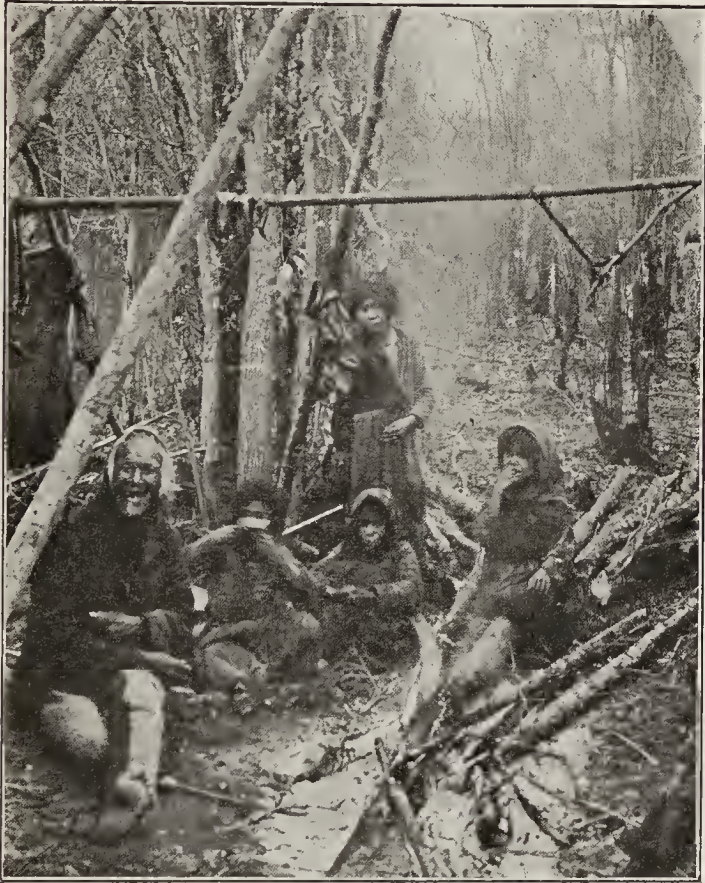


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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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Until recent times, every article even of prime necessity, took a year to reach its destination in Athabaska-Mackenzie. In the most distant Mis-



A CAMP OF "SLAVES" INDIANS.

sions, if a letter were written asking or "ordering" some needed article, two years would pass before the arrival of what was sought. Purchases were



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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then made in Europe. Three years might easily pass in some cases, owing to postal delays, or to some mistake or neglect on the part of the agents of the Hudson's Bay Company. When letters were lost through some accident in flood or snow-field, how much greater was the trying isolation of the waiting and wanting correspondent in the north country!

(2) The Indians, scattered through the MacKenzie woods, and to whom the Grey Nuns have made themselves the devoted Mothers in Christ, belong to the great *Déné* family, of whom Father Morice has written at considerable length. At Lake Athabaska there are some Crees who are clients of the Convent there.

The Northern *Dénés*\* include the *Montagnais*, between Lake Athabaska and Great Slave Lake;†

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\*The *Dénés* (i.e. Men, their own name for themselves) have been from time immemorial in both the North and the South of North America, thus surrounding other Indian families, without intermingling. "Their most populous districts are to be found in the South of the United States, where they are known under the name of Nabajoes and Apaches respectively." *Hist. Cath. Church, IV. Canada*, by A. G. Morice O.M.I., Vol. 1., p. 196. It will be seen in the course of our narrative that the Northern *Dénés* are different in character from those Southern, whose names have such an evil sound.

†A considerable body of the *Montagnais* occupied the neighborhood of Cold Lake and Heart Lake, Alberta, where in modern times they chose their reserves. The Cold Lake reserve enjoys since 1916, the advantage of a hospital and a school, both under the care of the Sisters of Charity, of Notre Dame d'Evron.

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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*the Slaves*, to the west of Great Slave Lake and along the Mackenzie River as far as Fort Simpson; the *Hareskins*, along the Lower Mackenzie, and in particular near Fort Norman and Good Hope; the *Loucheux* (meaning squint eyed, but many people have a name which they do not deserve) near the Mackenzie delta; the *Dog's Ribs* (Plats-Côtés-de-Chien), ranging from the northeast of Great Slave Lake as far as Great Bear Lake, and having Fort Rae, on the North Arm of Great Slave Lake, as their base; the Castors (*Beavers*), a tribe now almost extinct, on Peace River. The *Caribou Eaters*, of Fond du Lac (Lake Athabaska), and the *Yellow Knives* east of Great Slave Lake, are of Montagnais descent.

There are children of every one of these tribes in the institutions which are under the care of the Grey Nuns. After a time, one can easily distinguish the tribal characteristics even in those children. The general remark is sure to be made that, the further north the Indians go, the more sprightly, merry, frank and warm-hearted they become.

Of all the Indian races with which missionaries have had to deal in America, the Dénés seem to have been the most winning. It is true that their pagan traditions had firmly established some inhuman customs among them, and that some traces

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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of these remain even after sixty years of Christian preaching. But the Dénés were at all times found more straightforward, peaceful and religious than their southern neighbours, the Crees. The Missionaries attribute this moral superiority to the Dénés' nomad life—which nearly always keeps the members of the same family together, and therefore away from many occasions of sin—and also to their many privations, which are always, even when by no means wished for, a check upon evil inclinations. It was with much good will and joy that the poor Dénés received the priest, who brought them "the good Word" about a God, made like unto themselves, and suffering and dying like them and for them.

The grossest faults of the Dénés, when the missionaries came amongst them, were polygamy, and cruelty to women and children. They took pride only in their sons. When a Montagnais used a certain expression, it was only the circumstances of the case which could show whether he meant "my daughter" or "my dog." Beating their wives every day, keeping them without food, and laying heavy loads upon their shoulders, and sometimes even killing little girls, were not considered in any way wrong. The Christian religion did not take very long to banish such barbarous customs. The faults hardest to correct are sen-

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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sitiveness, cowardice, never-ending and pitiless tittle-tattle, brazen mendicancy, and the spend-thrift mind, which never thinks of to-morrow.

For the children of those Indians, and for themselves, when prostrated by illness, the Grey Nuns entered the Far North, and built their Convents in various places during the last fifty years.

④ (3) But how was it found possible to build those Convents, or to provide for their upkeep? All the inmates—the children, the sick, and the poor Nuns themselves, however mortified—had to be fed and clothed, and kept warm, and medically tended. In such a place, how and by what ways and means was it found possible to supply the needs of so many?

Let it be remembered that no help could be expected from the Indians themselves of the Mackenzie district. There are indeed other tribes, of the same Déné race, in which the Christians quite understand their duty of “supporting” those who do them good. This is the case, for instance, at Ile à la Crosse and the Missions of which it is the centre, as well as in British Columbia. In those places, the Indians, who, it must be said, are better off than their brethren of Mackenzie, give the Missionary some of the best fruits of their hunting or fishing expeditions. They also supply him

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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with firewood, and bring him from camp to camp without payment. It must be acknowledged also that even in Mackenzie the Missionary is assisted when he has to visit the sick, and to follow the scattered families into their wild woods. Of late years, some of the tribes, especially in the neighbourhood of Great Slave Lake, have begun to see the meaning and the importance of a certain precept of the Church.

But, when all this has been said, it is necessary also to record that even at this day in the Mackenzie Missions the priests and Nuns are expected by the poor Indians to be always givers, not receivers. The Northern Indian is not himself a giver. On the contrary he takes all that he can get. He thinks it the most natural thing in the world that the Palefaces should give him everything. And he is perpetually begging whatever he wants or fancies. If he sees a stock of provisions being laid in before winter, he thinks the priests and nuns unreasonable and avaricious. He knows that he could easily dispose of the provisions this very day. As for coming to the help of his Father in God by tithe, or gift, or unpaid service, such an idea never enters his head. Of course, as living from hand to mouth, he is often miserably poor himself. But if abundance comes to him through fishing or the chase, it soon disappears, or the

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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money for which he sells it. The lucky huntsman, or fisherman, or trapper begins to feast sumptuously. He gives a feast to his family, and to his friends, and even to strangers. He takes it for granted he will have as good luck another time. If any of the spoils should happen to be wanted in the Mission House or Convent even the smallest portion must be paid for. The fact is that the Indian looks upon Priests and Nuns as rich. He says they have only to send a little bit of paper into the "Great countries," and it will bring them back a cargo. If you tell him that in those "great countries" there are poor needlewomen who stint themselves for his benefit; that the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood collect penny by penny, for the Indian missions, sums which he would squander in an hour, he will hardly believe or understand you. He will probably laugh and say, "But I see you have such or such a thing there; give me that." Such is the childish mind of the Indian, though his intelligence is very keen on some subjects. As regards "mine and thine" he seems to be unteachable. He is a communist by nature. Whenever he has anything himself, he gives it away freely and cheerfully to the first that comes, of his own friends. It must be repeated, however, that he has no feelings of generosity in regard of those who leave



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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home and native land, to serve him at great cost. The saintly Bishop Grandin forewarned the Nuns whom he was beseeching to come into his diocese: "You will sacrifice yourselves for our poor Indians; but you will receive from them nothing but their vermin—for which also they would expect payment, if they thought you could make any use of them." Some of them have asked the Nuns to pay them for the children whom the Nuns feed and clothe and teach.

Such being the state of things, how were the missionary foundations made possible and enduring?

The first answer to be given must name, with deepest gratitude, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. It was that great Society of Paris and Lyons which made possible the evangelization of the North. Even at this day, during all the confusion and loss caused by the war, this admirable Society finds means to continue its noble and generous work.

A word of gratitude is also due to the Society of the Holy Childhood, which has continued, year after year, to help the struggling Missions in the Northwest.

Likewise we would like to mention *The Catholic Church Extension Society of Canada* and

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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thank that noble body for the substantial help it has, during these later years, accorded our difficult endeavours, and which it still continues with undaunted generosity.

The Province of Quebec, it must be remembered, has not been backward in her contributions, and thus materially aided replenishing our fast-vanishing funds.

But all these contributions put together could not keep pace with the growing needs of the Missions, and especially of the Indian Industrial Schools. For some years past, the Canadian Government has been paying a capitation grant for a limited number of pupils. But the number of pupils actually received is always much larger than that fixed by the Government, and, besides, the grant would not, in any case, suffice to meet the cost of goods and carriage in a country of such distances.

There remain, therefore two other resources which have enabled the Catholic Missions to live. They are the charity of individual benefactors, and the manual labours of the Grey Nuns and the Oblates. The Bishops, from time to time, go into the "great countries" on questing expeditions. The Nuns and the missionaries, remaining at their posts, live sparingly, and add to their still rude buildings. They clear the soil, they dig and delve, and

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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on the surface of the earth (which remains always frozen beneath the surface) they grow whatever they are able to save from the frosts of summer nights, and the dry heats and locusts of July days.

The alms given to the Bishops or others are used to purchase a stock of articles (such as groceries, cloth, household utensils, powder, shot, tobacco, tea, etc.) which, in the primitive north, can be exchanged for other things more needed.

Mgr. Breynat, the present Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie, has a farm near Fort Smith (which is on the Salt River, at the northern boundary of Alberta), from which, with the assistance of the little farm-yards at Fort Resolution and Fort Providence, it is possible to supply a limited quantity of provisions to the scattered Missions.

But some butcher's meat, of which there is nearly always time to forget the taste, and the produce of a little garden in a lucky season, and some preserved foods,—all these together would not suffice to carry the communities and schools through the prolonged northern winters. It is chiefly upon their own labours in hunting, trapping and fishing, that the hungry have to rely in those desolate regions.

Meat may be provided by Indian hunters, and it is used when fresh, or dried, or smoked. But it is not always easily found, and sometimes

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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the poor hunter has to rove the woods so long, before what he seeks comes suddenly in his way, that he faints, or perhaps perishes from hunger.

It is fish, however, that is the principal food of the North: fish of various kinds, trout, white-fish, Mackenzie salmon, pike, carp, herring, etc. Such fish of the North, even without dressing or sauce, but simply cooked in its own juice, is quite tasty and nourishing. The goodness of God has provided abundance of this palatable food in the very poorest and most barren of the waste places of the world.

But it is no easy task to secure and to preserve the needed quantity of this food. How many stories the Oblate Fathers and brothers have to tell of nets swept away by storms, of unwished-for ebb and unwished-for tide, of the late arrival of the migrating shoals, of the sudden beginning of winter, of such frost as in one night, perhaps in one hour, leaves the fish-laden boats ice-bound far away from the banks! One of the Autumn months is given up to fishing, when the school or shoal is making for the centre of the great lakes, or for the Arctic Sea. Great quantities are then taken, carried home to the perhaps distant Mission House, stored up out of reach of the hungry dogs, and in a place where the thaw will not quite spoil the store. Let it be remembered that the dogs also

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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must be fed on fish, and that the dogs take the place of horse and donkey in the frozen north. Suppose then a large community, a house full of children with Indian appetites, and a good team of indispensable four-footed servants who draw the sledge, and we shall not be surprised to hear that 25,000 fishes are not too many for the yearly supply of one establishment. But if the autumn fishing is a failure, or if the harvest of the sea is only a poor one, or if the frost has been later than usual, and the stock of fish gets very "high", then comes, for many, a harder task than that of "the Pilot of Galilean Lake," for they are obliged, day by day for months, in sixty or eighty degrees of frost, to say "I go a-fishing", and to entice the daily food from under two, or four, or six feet of ice.

The Mother General of the Grey Nuns received some years ago a letter which may be quoted here as telling once for all some of the hardships and privations accompanying the struggle for daily food in the far North. The letter was written in December 1897, by the Reverend Father Lecorre, now invalided, though not inactive, but in 1897 the very active priest in charge of the Mission at Fort Providence. He wrote: "The untimely frost played us a very mean trick in the autumn. As a rule, our fishing continues until the middle of

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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October. But this year, in the end of September, a fierce snow-storm from the north froze up our fishing grounds, and swept away nearly all our nets. We tried to think that milder weather would return. Vain hope! The masses of ice continued to float and drift upon the great river, and the snow was heaped up to a great height, so that



FISHING THROUGH HOLES IN THE ICE.

we had to be content with 8,000 fishes instead of 20,000, the least number that we need. You understand what all this means—fishing all through the winter, almost every day, at Big Island (Grande-Ile), forty miles away from the Mission. What sufferings for our poor Brothers, on the frozen lake, amid the driving snow! What fatigues for those with the sledges! And how short-handed



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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we are here, for all the work at home! And will the fishing under the ice succeed? We do not yet know. Sometimes in a severe winter, there is no fish to be caught at Big Island”.

As this letter shows, the principal fishermen of the Mackenzie Missions are our Oblate Brothers. They have kept the Northern Convents alive. True religious, and true missionaries, these dear Brothers, in imitation of St. Joseph, consecrate their lives to hidden and lowly labour, and they look for no reward in this world. It is they also who build the huts or houses, who collect the enormous quantities of wood required for fuel, who man the boats in the summer season, work the saw-mills, and supervise the men employed. In the winter when an Indian hunter wants to sell the moose or reindeer, which he has dispatched in the forest, he describes the place where he left it—perhaps a week before—he is paid, and off he goes. The Brother then harnesses his dogs, fastens on his snow shoes, and sets out to retrieve the precious purchase. How many a sensational story each of those brave Brothers is able to tell of his experiences on such journeys—of snow driven not in flakes, but in fine dust, of hidden holes in the snow field, of a snow heap which gives way under the feet like shifting sand, and of cold winds piercing to the marrow! Let it be said,

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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however, that a visitor to the Northern Missions, will be most likely to find an Oblate priest or Bishop beside the Brother, whenever fishing, or carting, or wood cutting, or building, or the like, has to be done.

And now what of the Nuns, who are the most worthy of honourable mention? Even in manual labour the Grey Nuns of Mackenzie have not spared themselves. They have dug up stumps and roots, clearing many a glade in the forest; they have tilled, and sown, and gathered. Some of them have even turned their hands to building operations, and all kinds of useful work. Sister Michon wrote from Providence in 1892, after the departure of Sister Ward: "As we have no one now to accompany the singers, I have begun to learn how to play. It is not easy at fifty years of age, but I hope to succeed, though not particularly well, for my fingers are not so pliant as they were thirty years ago. I am handier with hatchet or saw, in household work, and cabin building, than with a note of music. But in this poor country, so far away from assistance of any kind, we must only do the best we can."

In the beginning, and for many years, the Sisters used to go from Fort Providence to the autumn fishing. Their little camp was pitched in a suitable spot, on the shore. As a rule, they had

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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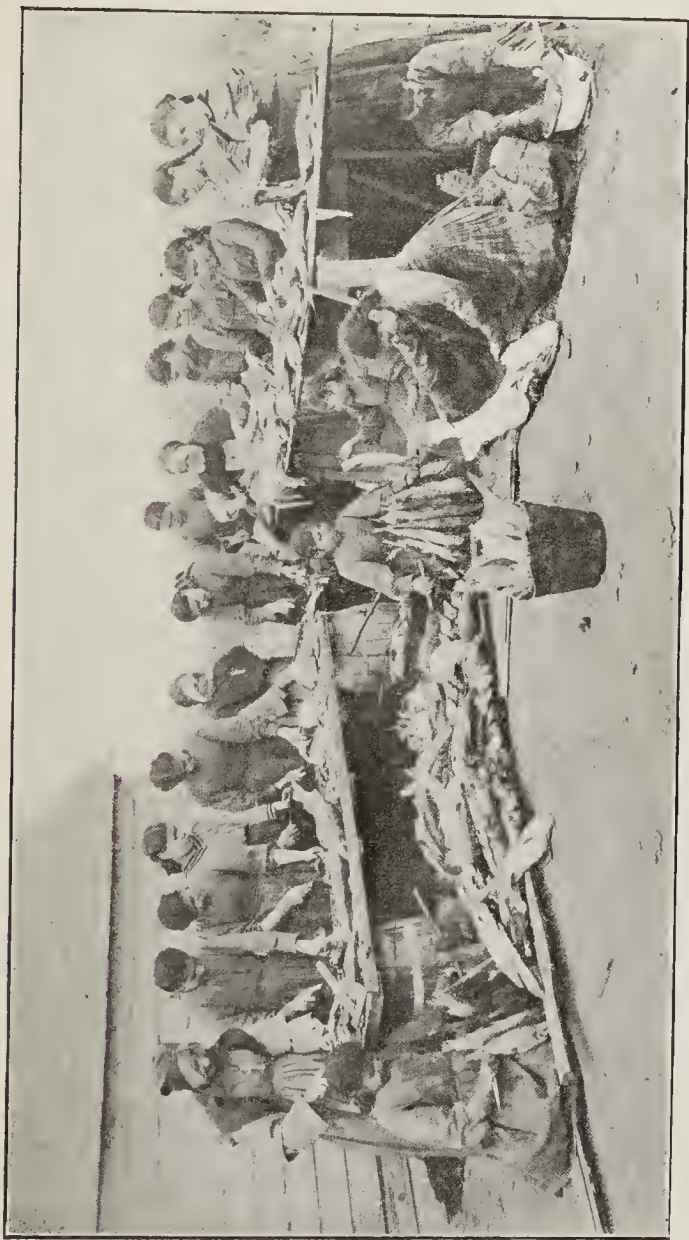
Mass every day. Whilst attending duly to their religious exercises, the Sisters busied themselves, all through the fishing season, preparing the meals, mending the nets, and dressing the fish taken. In a word they shared most cheerfully the labours, privations, risks, and disappointments, of those who were trying to keep a struggling Mission alive.

One of the many disappointments and trials in which they shared only too fully, is connected with St. Edward's day 1903. The fishing season at Big Island had been quite a success. The cargo was in the flat boat. The current would carry all hands to the Mission, forty miles away. Along with the Nuns, were Brother Mark and Brother Olivier, and the Superior, Father Edward Gouy. What could be more promising than to make a start for home in the evening of the Superior's feast day, October 13? After three or four hours' sailing, the boat began to find itself among small blocks of ice, driven after them by the wind from Great Slave Lake. These little icebergs moved, and the boat moved too. But in a little time the boat stopped dead: it was the prisoner of the ice floes. When daylight came, the travellers found themselves fast-bound amid the Willow Islands, all the waters, as far as the eye could reach, being now frozen over. What was to be done? Nothing

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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After the Catch.  
Sister and Orphan Girls preparing food for a whole week.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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except to wait without shelter, and in bitter cold, until the ice was strong enough to bear. After a wait of one day, the travellers, invoking their Guardian Angels, trusted themselves on the trembling ice, and brought their tent to the nearest island. There they remained four days, meanwhile making, with their hatchets, a passage from the boat into Beaver (Castor) Lake, (A larger expansion of the MacKenzie) which they thought still free from ice. When this very laborious and risky work was done, they tried to move the boat, but it was fast anchored by its own weight in the deep ice. There remained nothing now to be done except to save their own lives, and to get away. They took their small fishing boats along the channel which had cost them so much, only to find that Beaver Lake too was frozen! They had to return to their island, and to spend a fifth night there. Next day, the whole company, abandoning all their precious provisions, set out to walk to Fort Providence, along the frozen waters, and through the wild woods.

Such is the dear country—dear, precisely, because of the sacrifices which it imposes—the dear country into which God called our devoted Grey Nuns half a century ago, and in which until now they alone, with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate,

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## THE FAR NORTH INDEED!

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have been the messengers of God's mercies to those of whom the world makes no account.\*

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\*The Grey Nuns will be only pleased to find here mention of the Sisters of Providence. These Sisters have never seen the Mackenzie, nor Lake Athabaska, but in the Peace River country, and in Alaska, they have spread quickly. Between 1894 and 1912 they founded the Indian institutions at Grouard (Lesser Slave Lake), St. Augustine (Peace River and Smoky River), Vermilion, Lake Wabaska, Sturgeon Lake, and St. Bruno. In Alaska, the Sisters of Providence have charge of the hospitals and schools at Fairbanks, and Nome.

The Sisters of St. Anne, whose Mother-House is at Lachine, near Montreal, have charge of both school and hospital at Dawson, in Yukon Territory, and at Holy Cross.

These various foundations, of Peace River, Alaska, and Yukon, though much later, and, by comparison, less difficult, than the foundations made by the Grey Nuns, have, nevertheless, demanded many sacrifices, and have been very meritorious in the sight of God.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL, FORT PROVIDENCE

(1867-1917)

PROVIDENCE Mission was founded by Bishop Grandin in 1861.\* Mgr. Taché had asked him to choose a central place in which the Bishop to be appointed for Athabaska-Mackenzie might fix his residence, and where a Convent might be founded. "Without Nuns," said Mgr. Taché, "we shall not be able to do any permanent good in these Missions."

Mgr. Grandin considered that the best "central place" would be North of Great Slave Lake. Then he asked himself if Big Island (Grande-Ile or Grosse-Ile) would serve. This island, just at the point where Great Slave Lake, pouring its waters towards the North, forms the Mackenzie river, was the resort of the Indians in the spring time and in the fall. Already in 1858, Father Grollier had

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\*This was the only occasion on which Mgr. Grandin as Bishop visited Athabaska-Mackenzie. His visit, during which he had to suffer a great deal, lasted three years and two months (1861-4). See *Vie de Mgr. Grandin*, by Fr. Jonquet O.M.I. Such was the odour of sanctity, in which the first Bishop of St. Albert lived and died, that the cause of his Beatification has been brought before the Holy See.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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founded there the Mission of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which was visited by the Missionaries once or twice every year. But Big Island was sometimes flooded; it grew very little wood; and the soil was such that it could never supply the needs of an orphanage, or any considerable number of persons. Bishop Grandin therefore resolved to try elsewhere, feeling sure that the Indians would follow where the Blackrobes led.

Following the course of the Mackenzie for forty miles, he came, at the foot of a long rapid, and on the right bank of the river, upon a well-wooded headland of even surface, and fertile soil, stretching out a tapering point towards a surrounding semi-circle of isles and islets in the broad Mackenzie.

At the side of this headland was a sloping channel, forming a very good landing place for boats.\* Here Bishop Grandin landed, and duly taking possession of the spot for a central Mission, he planted there a large Cross, made by Brother Kearney. He wrote to Mgr. Taché: "I have called the place La Providence, for I believe it destined to be the Providence of our northern Missions. If we had a little community here, we could easily

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\*In the early days, this little harbour was full of fish. But it was soon exhausted, and for fishing on a large scale it became necessary to return to Big Island.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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THE FORT PROVIDENCE CATHOLIC MISSION.

Notice the blocks of ice rolled down by the Mackenzie, in autumn, and frozen pe-le-me-le on the river. These obstacles render the passage of sleds extremely difficult.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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from this centre visit all this north country". It may be mentioned here that in 1915 the Rev. Father Belle, Visitor General of the Mackenzie Missions, gave this Mission the name "Notre Dame de la Providence." The official name of the place in civil documents is Fort Providence, for, in this particular instance, the Hudson's Bay Company, usually first in the field, was content to follow the missionaries and their Indians, and to accept the name already given.

The first years at Providence—1861-3, before the coming of the Nuns—were years of the greatest poverty and hardship. The history of those years will, please God, be told in later times. As soon as Bishop Grandin had provided what was absolutely necessary to give food and shelter to the Missionary Fathers, he turned his attention to the building of a house to shelter the Nuns. The winter of 1863-4 was given up to this work. The Hudson's Bay Company assisted, lending the services of some of their men. The Bishop's special duty was to bring the wood—of course with the help of the dogs—from an island just in front of the headland. Father Grouard (now Bishop), Brother Alexis, and the hired men squared the timber, preparing it for its various purposes in walls and roof and floor. By way of laying the first stone of the building, Bishop Grandin drove

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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in the first peg. Father Grouard drove the second. Nails were quite unknown in the Far North, at that date.

In 1865, Mgr. Faraud, the new Bishop, the first Vicar Apostolic of Athabaska-Mackenzie, visited Fort Providence. He found the house intended for the Nuns almost ready. He had a very skilful hand himself, and he set to work to make the furniture for the new house, whilst leaving all detailed household arrangements to be made by the Sisters themselves when they came. The house being now ready for them, five of the Grey Nuns set out for the Far North. They were Sisters Lapointe (Superior), Brunelle, Michon, St. Michael, and Ward. A courageous Franciscan Tertiary, Marie Domithilda Letendre, accompanied them. They left the Mother House, Montreal, on September 17, 1866, on their way to St. Boniface (Red River), where they were to spend the winter. They were accompanied by Mgr. Taché, who had gone to Montreal, in order to have some voice in the selection of those who were to begin the new foundation. By 1866 railroads were spreading in many directions, and these travellers passed through the United States, reaching St. Paul in Minnesota by train from Chicago. At St. Paul they were met by Red River carts, but unfortunately we have no record of the pleasures or pains of

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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their journey in those carts over the 500 miles which separate St. Paul, Minnesota from St. Boniface, Manitoba. Was the so-called road between the two places any better in 1866 than in 1852, when Mgr. Taché and Fathers Lacombe and Grollier were the first to trust themselves to the same track? "The road was dreadful," Mgr. Taché wrote. "You should have seen a poor Bishop, and two Priests, up to their waists in the mud, tugging and dragging in their efforts to lift horses and carts out of the same mud. And this not merely once in a while, but hundreds of times on our journey."

The Missionary Sisters spent the winter of 1866-7 very happily with their Sisters at St. Boniface. Yet they were anxious to go forward to their own work in their own place. Sister Lapointe wrote: "We wanted to be on our way to our own poor home, whose desolate and destitute conditions had more attraction for us than all the rich and pleasant places in the world." Sister Lapointe and Sister Ward have fortunately left us in writing portion of the history of those early days, which it is our happiness to be able now to utilize in these pages. The lines written by the light of an oil lamp, in the first Mackenzie winter, now form an honourable memorial of the past fifty years of the missionary labours of the devoted Grey Nuns.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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The travellers to the north knew at St. Boniface that Bishop Faraud had come 450 miles, from Lake Athabaska to Lac la Biche (north east of the present Edmonton), to meet them, and accompany them to Providence Mission. Hence they felt regret that unforeseen delays kept them still at the Red River, whilst the Bishop was waiting for them at La Biche. There had been terrible prairie fires that spring, as Archbishop Taché afterwards explained. It was absolutely necessary to let the grass grow again before the ox-carts could be used, for the oxen have to feed on what they find. Moreover the weather was exceptionally bad, and the track was much worse than usual. In one caravan alone 250 animals (oxen or horses) were lost through hardships of the road and the bites of mosquitoes.

At last on June 8, 1867, the Nuns set out on their journey of 910 miles from St. Boniface. The first part of their journey was by bullock carts without springs, along the track which passed through Portage-la-Prairie, Qu'Appelle, Carlton, and Fort Pitt, crossing hundreds of torrents and streams, when the carts had sometimes to be taken to pieces, and turned into boats.

The Sister Superior's own manuscript says:—"At last we left St. Boniface on June 8, under a heavy downpour of rain, lasting all day, by way

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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of heaven's blessing on our work. The depth of the mud was really alarming. At one point, I was afraid a member of my little flock was going to be left behind, for Sister Ward, not being a very good walker, sank so far that it took a very strong arm to lift her out. Yet we were all happy at having made a start. The first day, we went no farther than Saint François-Xavier, where we intended to rest that night. The unceasing rain kept us there for three days. It seemed as if the deluge had come again, and the flood-gates of heaven were opened. There was quite a foot of water everywhere. We thought that we must be having our worst experiences in the beginning, and that everything would be bright and pleasant later on. We looked forward to the great prairies, undulating like the waves of the sea; we saw in imagination the flowers, and the blossoms. and we thought that the fruits too would be ours before the end of our long journey. Oh, how deceitful is fancy! The rain kept falling every day. It lasted ten, twelve, even fifteen consecutive days, ceasing only for some rare moments when the sun pierced the clouds, and seemed to be heaping coals of fire upon our heads. What hardship in our going, what little rest in our halts! Many a time we made our beds on the bare ground, on a marshy soil, our blankets, our cloaks, and all our

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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belongings, having been steeped in rain all through the day. And yet the nights were so cold. But away with all delicacy, and all fear! I naturally thought that our health might suffer seriously from all that we had to go through. God be praised, we were nothing the worse after all our little sufferings and privations. He for whom we make these sacrifices keeps us as the apple of His eye: not one of us has had the slightest illness. To me it looks like a miracle, and I wish my feeble voice could reach all intelligent creatures, calling on them to give praise and thanks to our God, who so watches over and sustains His children, when they cast all their care upon Him.

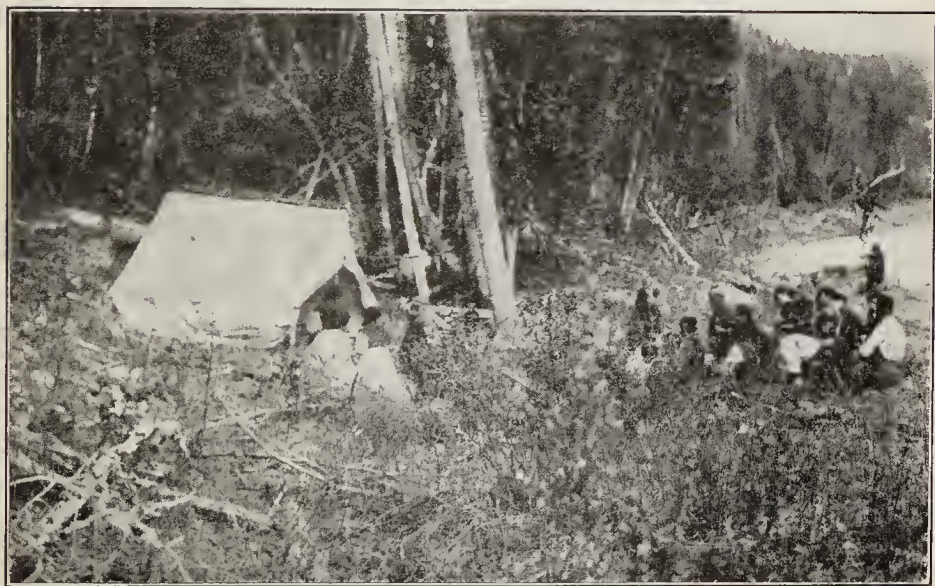
Rain and cold were not at all our greatest trials in this long journey. How many times we were delayed on the banks of a stream or torrent, waiting for the deep waters to flow away! Very often there was no ford to be found, and, of course, there was no boat or barque in those wild and desert regions. We sometimes waited for two or three days, in places where the crossing takes only a few minutes, when the weather is fine. In such cases, however, it was a pleasure to see the wonderful ingenuity of our drivers. In a twinkling, with great sheets of parchment, they turned our carts into boats, fastened a rope to either end, and kept drawing them to and from either bank, until

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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all the luggage had gone over. Then it was the turn of the Sisters, for whom the important point was not to change the centre of gravity. The least mistaken move might have given us a bath of muddy water. Thank God, we came safely through all our difficulties. I do not know how we could have done so, or how we could ever have



HOLY MASS IN A TENT.

continued our journey at all, if it had not been for the special help and protection which God's good Providence sent us. If we had hardly the right to expect such help, it has made us all the more grateful. The Rev. Father Lacombe (that old and experienced *voyageur* of the prairies) had

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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reached St. Boniface during the winter so as to be with us from the beginning of our journey towards the north. Mgr. Taché had appointed Rev. Father Leduc to be with him, and we could not possibly have better guardians. This is not the place to tell how much we owe them. God Almighty, who knows, will be sure to reward them.

Our journey as far as Lac La Biche, lasted from June 8 to July 31. Of the hundred incidents, great and small, of that long journey, the story of one will give a sufficient idea.\* It was July 30, and according to our own pre-arranged time-table, we

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\*One incident, not mentioned by the Sister Superior, but told now in our own day, by Father Leduc and Sister Domithilda, ought to be chronicled here. One day, during a halt on the banks of the English river, between Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt, whilst Sister Ward was busy in the tent, and the other Sisters were gathering wild fruits, Sister Domithilda was cooking dinner in the open air. Suddenly her clothes caught fire, and she was a living torch. Father Leduc, along with Father Maisonneuve (who had joined the party at Carlton), quickly used all the blankets, etc., within reach in an endeavour to put out the flames. They were not succeeding, when Father Leduc spied a pail of milk, still smoking, fresh from the cow, and emptied it upon the poor victim. Father Maisonneuve's hands were so burnt that he was unable to say Mass for a fortnight, and the Nun's hands and face bore many scars. She tells nowadays how Father Leduc, "having extinguished her" with the precious liquid, said, "I should not like to be anywhere near you in purgatory: the fire makes you scream too much".

The brand from the burning, the victim of the accident, having quickly recovered all her wits, answered at once with a laugh, "But, Father, don't you see you would get out all the sooner?"



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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ought to have been at Lac la Biche on the fifteenth, at the latest. We had heard at Fort Pitt that Mgr. Faraud was waiting for us at La Biche since June 25. We could not help feeling very uneasy, not knowing whether the Company's barges might not have gone forward, obliging the Bishop to take his return passage northward. However, we were hoping to reach La Biche on the morrow, and we wished for wings to carry us there in all haste.

We rose at 1 a.m., and we were on the way at 3 a.m. We had to pass through a forest, over a winding track of deep ruts and clinging mud. All the morning we kept moving on, at what seemed a snail's pace. We were very silent, and rather disconsolate, having no idea of the distance, and wondering if we could arrive before night. Suddenly, at a turn in the road, which brought us out of a dark part of the forest, we saw two horsemen galloping towards us. What knights were these? Were they on the war path? Were these martial-looking figures enemies of ours, appearing now in the very last stage of our land journey? Oh, blessed surprise! In a moment we were down from the carts, and kneeling for the blessing of our Bishop. It was he (Mgr. Faraud) with Father Végreville. They had determined to come forward, and not to return without finding out for themselves the cause of our long delay. You can



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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imagine our feelings then. The Bishop, giving us a fatherly benediction, glanced round sharply to see for himself that every one of us was present, and every one of us in good health. How this kind father and pastor thanked God, who had watched over us, and had brought us safe and sound through so many dangers. For ourselves we seemed to have risen to a new life! No more anxiety or trouble for us! Under the pastoral staff of a beloved Father, the little ones of the flock have only to march on as they are guided.

In a few hours after meeting the Bishop, we were in the arms of our Sisters of the Lac La Biche Convent, finding that they had shared the Bishop's anxiety about our long delay. A few days' rest with them seemed necessary after our fatigues, but, when one is late, one has to hasten, trying to make up for lost time. Only half our journey was over, and not at all the more dangerous half. Hitherto, we had contended with mud; we were now to become acquainted with rivers, and lakes, and dangerous rapids, and to follow an unexplored route, without having strong arms enough to deal with its difficulties and dangers.\*

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\*Until 1867, the two routes to Mackenzie were from Hudson Bay, or from Winnipeg, by the Lakes and rivers which meet at La Loche Portage. From this Portage the voyageur descended the Clearwater river to MacMurray, on the Athabaska river, thus avoiding the rapids of the Athabaska, to the south of MacMurray.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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Indeed, we left everything in the hands of our dear and venerated Bishop and Father. It seemed to us we could not be shipwrecked in his company. It was a special trouble to him that we were bringing more things with us than could well find room in such a boat as we had. However, what God guards is well guarded. At three o'clock in the morning of August 3, 1867, we were all afoot and busy. After solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, we said a rather sorrowful good-bye to our Sisters, and, in presence of nearly all the people of the place, we set sail.

At first, everything went on beautifully. It was charming to watch our boat ploughing the limpid waters of Lac la Biche, and the little rivers

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The first who took the unexplored route from La Biche to Mac-Murray was Mgr. Taché in 1856. When Mgr. Faraud, in 1867, followed the same route with the Grey Nuns, he had far greater difficulties to overcome. Mgr. Taché went in the spring, in a light canoe, when the water was high. But in the autumn the rapids and cascades are more than ever rocky and treacherous. Mgr. Faraud, foreseeing this, had persuaded Mr. Christie, the Company's officer at Lake La Biche, to delay one of the barges, so that it might travel along with that which the Bishop had hired, and that each crew might help the other. But the Bishop's party had been kept 26 days waiting at Lake La Biche. The provisions had all been used up. The river was falling every day at an alarming rate. The Indians had grown impatient to be off. Mgr. Faraud was obliged, therefore, to let the Company's boat start without waiting for him. He knew well what additional dangers he and his boatmen and the Nuns would have to meet with. This explains the words of the Sister Superior in the text.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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which flow out of it, and it was hard to understand any anxiety about the rest of the voyage. At night came the rain, an unwelcome downpour. But we had a pretty good tent for camping out. The rain did us no great harm, and we even listened with pleasure to the murmuring of a little stream of



PASSING THROUGH THOUSANDS OF ROCKS.

rain-water, running quite close to us, yet not harming us in the least. The morning was delightful, a good breeze having driven the clouds far away. We sailed along quietly on a stream bordered with trees which looked lovely in the rays of the rising sun. At eight o'clock, we had to begin our day of sacrifices. In order to make them easier to

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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bear, our good Bishop offered up the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, and gave us Holy Communion, the food that makes the heart strong, so that it seemed to us as if we might, like Elias, walk for forty days and nights and feel no fatigue.

We had stopped near a rapid. Now, in these northern climes, people do as in towns that are besieged. They send away the useless mouths. As the water was low, our guide told us that our absence would be welcome at this point. The Bishop set off before us, to walk through the wood. We followed as well as we were able, whilst the boatmen dragged the boat along from rock to rock. There is no unmixed pleasure in this world. It was a pleasure to follow in the Bishop's foot-steps, but the high grass was so sodden with rain that, in a little while, our habits were so heavy and clinging about us, that we could hardly move at all. And at the same time a hot sun was beating down upon our heads. Going as we could, and stopping now and then to take breath, we walked that day about six miles. We were very glad indeed when invited to take our seats in the boat once more. We had discovered that courage is not the same as strength: we were quite exhausted.

Next day we felt sure that there could be nothing before us so trying as that march in the Bishop's steps. We were chatting very cheerful-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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ly, when there was a sudden order to stop. The boat could take us no further. From the point where we were, down to the Athabaska River (about 60 miles), there was a succession of little rocky rapids, where the shallows made it impossible for a heavily-laden boat to go. What was to be done? The best thing probably would have been to make two journeys on each such occasion. But our Indian boatmen said they were too tired, and that when once they went down a rapid they would not bring the boat back. Were we then to throw away half of our stores, or to walk once more? The things that we had brought so far had cost us much trouble and expense. We resolved to save them, and to be foot-passengers again. What we had now before us was no longer mere trudging through wet prairies for a few hours. We had now to make up our minds to walk on, for two or three days, sometimes through dense forest, sometimes over steep river-banks, sinking in the mud at every step, having to cross multitudes of tributary streams, and losing ourselves in thickets which showed no way out.

The dear Bishop went before us, with hatchet in hand, clearing such pathway as could be cleared, cutting down trees, and throwing temporary bridges over the ravines. But all his efforts on our behalf did not prevent us from becoming



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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absolutely breathless from fatigue. I was distressed to notice that some of the Sisters would not be able to hold out for long. However, we kept moving all the morning. Counting the windings in and out, we had done about fifteen miles. We were no longer in sight of the river, and so we could not tell whether our boatmen were ahead of us or were still behind. At last, through sheer exhaustion, we stopped to rest. We lighted a great fire, and in a little while we heard the cries of our men on the river bank, who, with a strong pull, all together, were dragging the boat through the water. Though not very valiant, we had got before them, after all.

At this place the boatmen halted, took a good meal and prepared to start again. I had to ask them to take Sister Ward on board. They agreed, on condition that she would pray to the "Great Spirits" for a favourable journey. Certainly, from the time of her going on board, the vessel went along very smoothly, hardly touching ground or rock anywhere. But for us, who tried to follow through the brushwood, things were less pleasant. We had not by any means recovered from the fatigues of the morning. The boatmen were far ahead of us; we screamed until they heard us. They stopped and waited. We had walked about six miles more. There was nothing for it but to

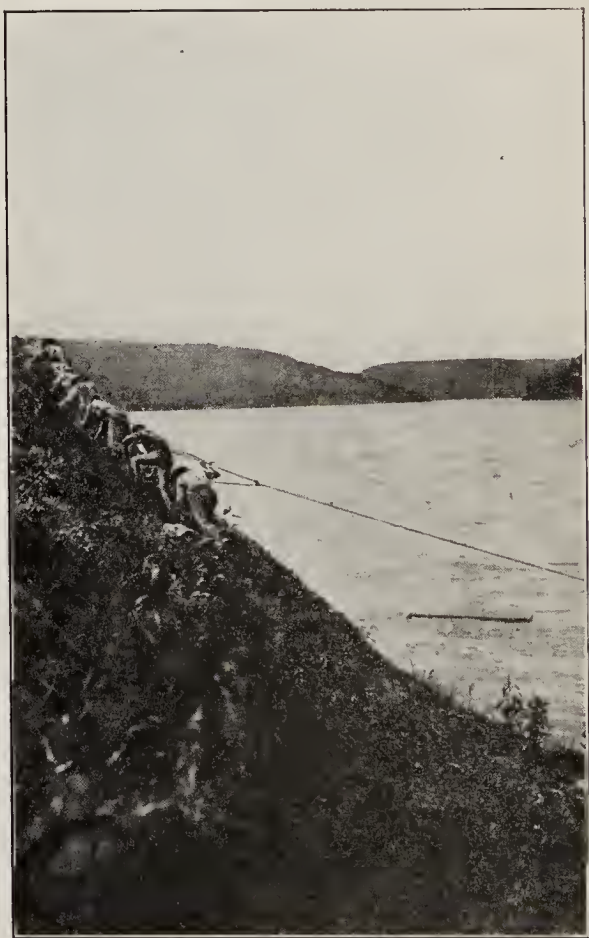


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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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go on board. But no sooner were we there than the barge grounded. The boatmen were obliged to carry the luggage on their shoulders. So it was



INDIANS AND HALF-BREEDS TOWING A BARGE.

that in two or three hours we had advanced only half a mile. Everybody feeling fatigued, we

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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camped out for the night somewhat earlier than usual. What would the morrow bring us?

Sleep is the kind restorer, and the night sometimes drives all cares away. All that particular night the rain came down heavily; the flashes of lightning were frequent, and the thunder shook the earth beneath us. We arose with aching sides, and stiff and feverish limbs. We trembled to think of what might be before us. But blessings and hardships come together; the heavy rain had made the river rise, and so we were told that all might now come on board. Thereafter, our barge went on smoothly, for the most part, and was easily managed by the boatmen in certain difficult parts of the river. However, we had to walk occasionally, but not for so long, nor under such conditions as on previous days.

After our third day of anxiety and fatigue, we saw at last the Athabaska River, which promised us two or three days of smooth sailing. This river has its own dangers, but we were able at first to enjoy the innocent pleasure of feasting our eyes upon scenery truly grandiose. The fast-running Athabaska carried us along towards the north, as if by enchantment, whilst giving us time to admire the picturesque and varied spectacles which every turn of the river presented. It was a pleasure too great to last.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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We thought we had gone through a great deal already, but we had only made a beginning: we had only served a little apprenticeship. One day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, we heard in the distance a booming, monotonous noise, seeming to come from the river. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing to account for the sound. I asked what it might mean, and I was advised to wait and see. In two hours we had reached Grand Rapid.\* At this place enormous rocks form an island in mid-stream. The waters on both sides fall into depths, on which one cannot look without growing dizzy. How our hearts beat high as we approached the island, for it was on that island that we had to land, at the very spot where the divided waters race madly to either side. One wrong turn of the oar might have sent us headlong

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\*Mgr. Faraud has left the following description of Grand Rapid. "The Athabaska in this place is as wide and deep as the Rhone. On both banks tower monstrous beetling crags which seem threatening to fall upon the traveller. From the same heights, in the course of time, and under pressure of ice, great masses of rock have actually fallen, and now form in mid-stream an island in which great pine trees grow. The current, which is very strong even above the island, gains enormous force at each side of the obstacles, and when the two streams meet, after forming many cascades, they come together with a roar, and throw up waves many feet high. The noise of these waters, harsh and terrifying, is not less than that of a hundred cannon firing at the same moment."

Mgr. Faraud, when going to meet the Grey Nuns, narrowly escaped from drowning in those high waves below the island, through which the Nuns passed with closed eyes.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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down the rapid, but our skilful guide brought the boat safely, away from either current, into a little landing-place between two rocks. There we got out, and passing from one trunk of a tree to another we were on the island, saying a fervent *Deo Gratias*. The men, not without much labour, carried all the luggage to the other extremity of the island, a distance of half a mile. But the barge remained. This could not be carried. It had to be drawn. The man-power was unequal to the task. The Bishop, looking very grave, came to ask us to bear a hand. We were harnessed two and two, and our additional help was such that the barge was successfully brought to the further end of our island. This was "portaging," indeed! As the Bishop had charged us not to pull hard, lest we might hurt ourselves, no harm was done, though we were fatigued, and the boatmen gaily complimented us on not having broken our collars. But I should have liked some of our Montreal friends to see us. Five Grey Nuns in harness! What a pretty picture!

So far, so good. Our next task was to get away from the island, and from the rapid. Whilst our boat danced up and down upon the waves, it was loaded with all the luggage, and then we ourselves got in. Moving off was really frightening. It seemed as if we were rushing to certain death. In

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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order not to see those raging waters we closed our eyes. In a few seconds we opened them, to find that the danger spot was past. After that experience, we were less afraid, or, at least, we could face the danger without growing pale. Indeed, some of the Sisters professed to enjoy shooting the rapids. Well, for the lesser ones it may be so. But they are of all sorts and sizes. One afternoon we climbed up a hill to gather saskatoons, of which there was a great abundance. As we were hurried, and as the fruit is small, we broke off some branches and brought them away to the boat. Just as we were eating our delicious fruit, the boat leaped into a rapid; the iron cutwater, striking a rock, was broken in pieces with a loud noise; the boat was shaken as the branches of a tree are shaken; and we in an instant were down in the whirling waters. What a fright we had! The fruits fell from our hands. Of course we screamed. Our hearts beat rapidly, and the perspiration streamed down our faces. People sometimes speak of being only frightened, and not hurt. But, half an hour after our fright, some of the Sisters were still so hurt as to be hardly able to breathe. This sudden descent put an end to all boasts about enjoying the rapids. However, it was the last of our difficulties on the Athabaska River.

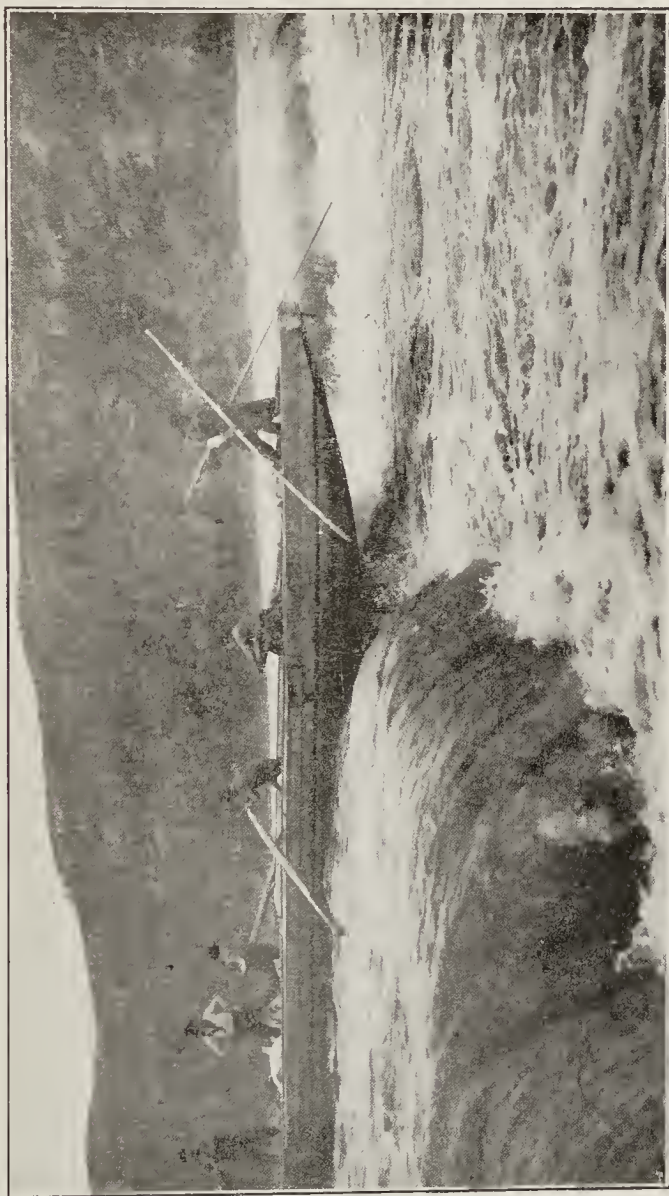
After passing MacMurray, we no longer



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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LEAVING A CASCADE ON ATHABASKA RIVER.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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landed at night. The boat was allowed to drift, and we rested as best we could. I saw the Bishop among the bales of goods. The side of a large stove was his mattress; a rough box for the north was his pillow. The space between decks was reserved for us. It was not a very roomy place. One had to pillow her head upon the feet of another. Perhaps these two nights between decks were the worst nights we had.

On August 13, 1867, we came in sight of the large and beautiful Lake Athabaska, its surface dotted all over with islets covered with green trees. We felt all the happier because we hoped to arrive before evening at Nativity Mission, Fort Chipewyan, the oldest Mission in these Northern parts. With a favourable wind we did arrive in good time, and we were received with many a volley fired in our honour. The Indians of Chipewyan were most curious about the Nuns, whom they thought different from ordinary mortals. They wanted to know if we said Mass, if we heard confessions, at least, of women. One of them came to me to kneel for my blessing.

Though we were in a hurry, we spent three happy days, for a very good reason, at the Nativity Mission. We found there Mgr. Clut, O.M.I., who was about to be consecrated as Mgr. Faraud's Auxiliary Bishop. With him—the titular Bishop

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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of Arindela—were Father Eynard, O.M.I., and Father Tissier, O.M.I. We were installed as Sacristans, and we made the pretty Church look quite grand for the consecration, which took place on the feast of the Assumption. The two Oblate Fathers had to take the place of Assistant Bishops, and the consecrating Bishop, Mgr. Faraud, had only, for other assistants in the ceremonies, good Brother Salasse, and some little acolytes. There were not many Indians present: the long and unexpected delay had obliged them to disperse. But how touching it was to be the witness of so solemn an event, in a place where a few years earlier the name of God had never been heard, and where now there was a good number of Christians, owing to the zeal and perseverance of the Missionary Fathers! It seemed to me that, although ecclesiastical dignitaries could not be present, the angels of heaven must have been there, along with their Queen, to assist in so august a ceremony, and to do honour to the King of Glory. We were recompensed for all that we had gone through, since we now found ourselves privileged to do something, on our own part, which added to the solemnity of an event unique in the Northwest.

It would have been a pleasure to stay longer at Nativity, but there seemed always to be a voice in the north wind, saying, "Come, come, we are

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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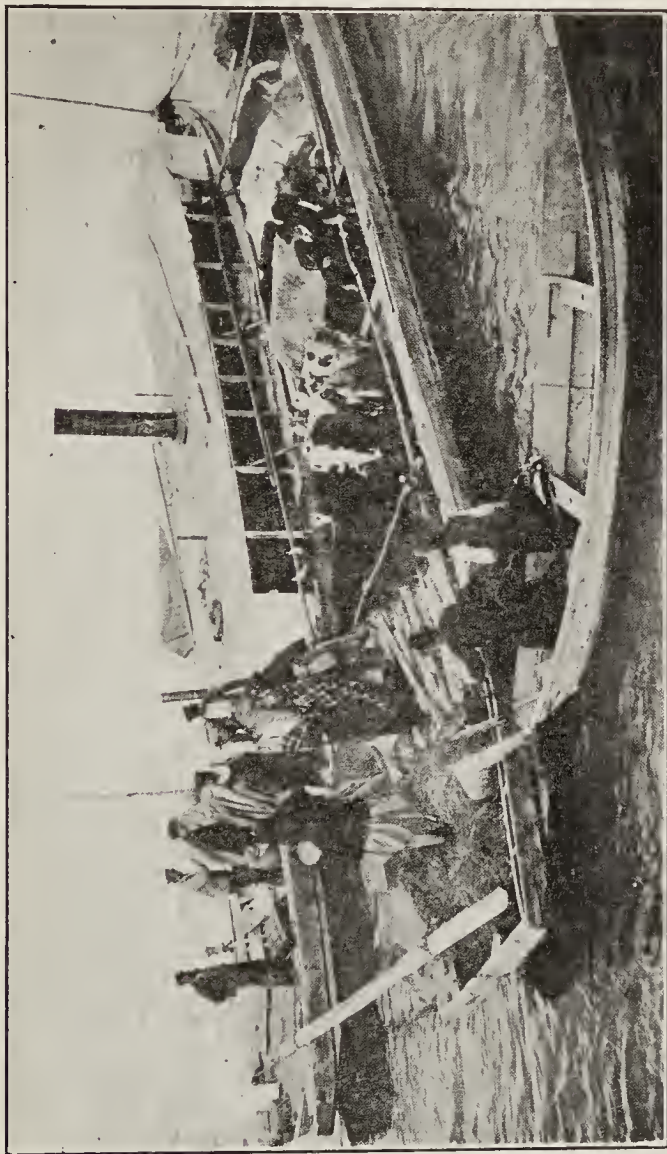
waiting." We started. Once upon the majestic Slave River, we soon lost sight of Lake Athabaska, and we seemed to have entered a new world. No more steep and rocky banks, but a river, almost as broad as the Saint Lawrence, flowing silently through wide-spreading prairies, bordered by forest trees. The days seemed short amid scenes of such magnificence, and they were made shorter by the swiftness of the current which bore us along. One day was enough to bring us to a succession of rapids, where the river divided into an immense number of channels by enormous boulders, boils up to a considerable height and falls with resounding crash at the foot of the cataracts. I speak of the Fort Smith Rapids, a chain whose links cover sixteen miles, the last obstacles to navigation on the way to the Arctic Sea. Drawing near these successive abysses, we could not help feeling frightened. Yet we had less reason for fear than elsewhere, not because the danger was less, but because our experienced guide had passed up and down the river scores of times, and had a very sure hand. In four places there were portages.

As soon as we got into calm water, beyond the last rapid, we were surrounded by Indians, who had come from a distance to meet us. Next day, we reached Salt river, and the house of the fam-

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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EMBARKING AT FORT SMITH, IN 1917.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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ous old "patriarch," Beaulieu. He is a Montagnais Half-Breed, whose good life has won him the esteem and affection of the Indians, all of whom look upon him as a father. It was with much emotion that we saw here those poor children of the woods assembled together to welcome us, and gathered round their Bishop in their humble chapel, assisting at Holy Mass with edifying piety. They sang during Mass, and their wish was gratified to hear the Nuns sing also. After the instruction, they sang, in their own language, a very beautiful hymn, and in such perfect harmony that we were really delighted.

We should have liked well to stay for a while at Salt River, whether to rest, or to enjoy what was so pleasing and edifying. But it was our duty to go forward still. Two more days and nights brought us to St. Joseph's Mission, Fort Resolution, Great Slave Lake. There the Rev. Father Gascon gave us a thousand welcomes in his humble abode. The poor Father had been a long time alone, and had wondered what the meaning could be of our long delay in coming. There were tears in his eyes, as he kept looking from the Bishop to us, and from us to the Bishop, seemingly not quite sure whether he was awake or dreaming. He would have wished us to make a long stay at Fort Resolution, but the Bishop wanted to move on, as the weather was fine.



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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It must have been Father Gascon's prayers and tears, like those of St. Scholastica, which brought on a storm. The Lake was so rough that we were obliged to remain two days at St. Joseph's Mission.

We were now in the last stage of our journey, and it was with pleasure that we set sail once more. Great Slave Lake is an inland sea, and a veritable cave of all the winds. We had to plough through its waves very slowly. Sometimes after sailing for a couple of hours, we had to put into land, and to remain for a whole day waiting for the storm to go down. These forced delays were all the more trying because we knew that we were so near our destination, so near the end of what seemed a never-ending journey. On August 27 we sailed for many hours, though the wind was not favourable. Towards evening it turned, and, in the hope of getting to La Providence the sooner, we decided to spend the night on board. An unlucky decision it was, for the wind soon changed again, the clouds gathered thick and black, and we soon were stranded. All night we remained exposed to the rain and the cold. Sleep was out of the question. Fortunately, this was the last of our many arduous adventures.

The light of the morning star was enough to show our guide where we were. He called up the boatmen, and in a short time we landed for breakfast on a little island, where the waters of the Great



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Lake rush out to form the broad Mackenzie. *Deo Gratias!* A few hours more, and we shall be at home!

Yet those hours seemed long, and it was only at three o'clock in the afternoon that we saw a flag flying on the Bishop's house. Gradually, other obstacles stood out quite clearly, and soon we saw on the bank a crowd of Indians and others, cheering our arrival, and firing off volleys in the gaiety of their hearts. We responded by intoning the *Magnificat*, and it was whilst we sang our Lady's hymn that we were welcomed by the Rev. Father Grouard, Brother Alexis and Brother Boisramé, and all the people. We were ashore, in a strange, though longed-for, land in our new country, our home, our tomb.

And now, dearest Mother General, is there anything more that I have to say? Never, since our arrival, have we regretted coming: never for a moment have we been unhappy. That does not at all mean that we have all that we can wish for! There are, in truth, many sacrifices to be made. But it was in order to make them that we came here. We find it rather hard to get used to the coarse food, which is always the same. We never taste bread.

Adieu, dearest Mother! This paper, happier than ourselves, will find its way into the bosom of

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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our loved community. We can only follow it in spirit. Or, rather, we shall go before it, for our thoughts fly back more quickly there. Adieu, good and dear Sisters all! Most probably, we shall never see one another again in this world. Adieu, until the blessed day of our meeting in a happier land! Please to remember us, day by day, at the foot of the altar, in our own old home, and again near the shrine of our venerated Foundress, Mother d'Youville."

Here ends the story of a march towards the North Pole in 1867.

In the last fifty years many other Grey Nuns have gone on similar expeditions. Mother Charlebois, visiting Providence Mission in 1880, wrote: "We had rain all day. We camped out, with all our linen wringing wet. I never foresaw that I should have to live, day and night, for months on those barges. It is a terrible experience for Nuns. The scrupulous or over-delicate would deserve special sympathy. But what can be done? There is no other way of reaching the northern Missions."

The Rev. Mother Piché, Superior General, paying an official visit to the northern convents, and suffering much from cold and hunger, and having to be content with cold food taken in the neighbourhood of tipsy Half-Breeds, wrote on May 24, 1912: "We had some difficulty in reaching

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Lake Athabaska, owing to the ice. I could bring nothing except a small portmanteau. All the boxes had to be left behind at Athabaska Landing, from which the barges start. Oh, what hardships one has to go through, on such a journey! If it were not to help in saving souls, surely no one could face the difficulties which our self-sacrificing Sisters do face so willingly."

In the autumn of 1893 Mother Stubinger was a month and five days on the Athabaska river, when returning from the north, whilst the snow fell without ceasing. She was saved from starvation by a few famished hares, snared in the night.

These few passages, chosen at random from a great number of letters, and the somewhat detailed account which we owe to Sister Lapointe, tell us of nothing but the ordinary and inevitable incidents of travel in the north. They tell us nothing of disasters—of dearly-bought goods sent to the bottom of some lake; of boats dashed in pieces on the rocks; of Nuns barely saved from drowning; of a tempest on Great Slave Lake, continuing for forty-eight hours, during which each raging wave seemed to be the last that the boat could survive. Yet Grey Nuns in their travels to the Far North have gone through such experiences as all these. One of them, Sister Marie-Marguerite, was on her way to Providence Mission in 1870, in company of

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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Mgr. Clut and Father Foure, O.M.I., when the guides ran away, leaving the little company to its fate at Grand Rapid. Bishop Clut set out on foot to look for help. It was a month before he could get back, and by that time the bad weather, and weariness, and hunger, and fever had brought the poor Nun to death's door. She died in another week at Lake Athabaska.\*

The Missionary Sisters of Mackenzie—of the Sacred Heart Hospital—saw at a glance what a great field of labour awaited their courage and self-denial. They saw that their self-sacrifice had to be the price which would rescue and uplift a race still sunk in barbarism. One of them wrote in 1867: "I must give you a few instances to show you what is the depth of the moral misery which we are called on to relieve. What I tell you will shock you to hear, as it sickens me to tell. It was a rather general custom of the savages in these countries to kill, and sometimes to eat, the orphan children, especially the little girls. Religion has made a great change in this respect, but infanticide is still by no means rare. A mother, looking with con-

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\*Father Roure also suffered much, and had a long illness, of which he still bears the traces. This veteran of the North, after thirty-nine years of solitude at Fort Rae, on the North Arm of the Great Slave Lake, among the Flat-Dog-Rib Indians, and after a few years at Fort Smith, on St. Bruno's Farm, which he began, and had just got into working order, when he had to leave it—is now the venerated Chaplain of the Grey Nuns at Notre Dame de la Providence.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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A GROUP OF ORPHAN GIRLS, IN THE EARLY DAYS.



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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tempt on her newly-born daughter, will say, "Her father has deserted me; I am not going to feed her." So she will wrap up the little one in the skin of an animal, smother her, and throw her into the rubbish-heap. Another mother, as she makes her way through a snow-field, will say, "My child's father is dead; who will now take care of it? I am hardly able to support myself." Thereupon she makes a hole in the snow, buries her child there, and passes on. There was a case of an Indian father who, in a time of sickness, lost his wife, and two or three of his children. There remained to him one child still in arms. For two or three days he carried the little fellow, then he left him hanging on the branch of a tree, and went his way. I have said more than enough to grieve you. Now you will quite understand that all these wretched people would rather have given their children to us than have killed them, or let them die."

The barbarous deeds of fifty years ago are occasionally repeated even now, if the Convent Orphanages are far away. But the poor children are usually saved, to be brought to the Convent by some charitable neighbour, as in the case of Gabriel and Rosalie.

Gabriel—who at his Baptism was thus named after the Bishop—belonged to a pagan group of the Sékanais tribe, living near the Rocky Moun-



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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tains, in the neighbourhood of Fort Nelson, in the northeast corner of British Columbia. He was about eight years of age when he saw his mother kill his father, and throw his little brother into the fire. He himself was saved from the same fate by his grandmother, who took him to a Sékanais named Barby, who had no children of his own. A few days later Barby's wife sickened and died. Barby after some incantations, thought the Spirit told him that the adopted child was the cause of his wife's death. Accordingly he left the boy alone, on the bank of the Nelson river, near his wife's grave, and he removed his tent to the opposite bank. He left the little boy without food or fire, and almost naked, and watching him across the river, he took deliberate aim at him with his gun, whenever he saw the boy wandering around the grave, or coming to the water to drink, or pulling up roots to satisfy his hunger. At the end of ten days, a Trader of the Hudson Bay Company at Fort Nelson, Boniface Laferty, who had been one of the first pupils of the Nuns at Fort Providence, was passing northwards to Fort Liard. He heard of the case from the little boy's grandmother. He told the two Indians whom he had with him to take the boy and hide him in a certain place, whilst he himself distracted the attention of the fierce Sékanais. The child, when found, was little more

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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than a skeleton, on which vermin and mosquitoes had been trying to feast. He was left at Fort Liard, "for the Nuns," by Mr. Laferty, and he was taken to Providence, 300 miles away, by Father Le Guen, O.M.I.

In the Orphanage there, Gabriel remained for two years, learning how to pray to the Great Spirit and His Divine Son. But Gabriel had brought lung disease from the Nelson river, and in spite of tender care, by day and by night, he died very young.

The story of Rosalie is different. The visitor to-day (1917) to Fort Resolution Convent (of which we have yet to speak) will be attracted by the intelligent and sweet face of the smallest, though not the youngest, of the sixty orphan girls, who rapidly range themselves in order, like steps of stairs, at the sound of the bell. This is Rosalie, seven years of age, speaking English and French, and the Indian dialect of her native tribe, the Dog-Ribs. Sister Ann Mary has taught her to recite and to act, in a way that provokes alternately laughter and tears. Rosalie, when left an orphan at four years of age, went to live with her uncle. The Dog-Ribs are all Christians, so she was not killed. But the original cruelty of the Indian heart justifies the name by which an orphan is called in the Northern languages, *the Weeper*.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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For a year Rosalie followed the camp, eating whatever she could find left over by others, and having for her only bed-clothes such odds and ends of peltry as were of no use to others. One night she felt she was getting frost-bitten, and she tried in



THREE SISTERS OF THE HARE-  
SKINS TRIBE.

From Fort Good-Hope, at the  
Fort Providence School.

vain to rekindle the dying embers in the hut. Next day, as she could not walk, she was taken away on a sledge, "for the Nuns." At Fort Rae, on the North Arm of Great Slave Lake, the Company's officer,

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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with his pocket knife, cut off both her feet, and so saved her life to be the baptized and educated Rosalie, if not the prairie flower, of the Fort Resolution Convent.

It is easy, therefore, to understand that the first and foremost work before the Grey Nuns in the Far North was to prevent the massacre of the innocents, and to bring to these children the blessing of Baptism at least.

Of a second task which the Nuns set before themselves, one of them wrote as follows:—"Another work which we have in view, is to gather together a number of Half-Breed or Indian children, and to give them a good education, so that they may be able afterwards to spread the knowledge of our holy religion among their relations and friends. Our schools will also give us Catholics a higher place in the esteem of our separated brethren, who, as you know, attach great importance to the external advantages of education."

School was opened for the first time at Fort Providence on October 7, 1867. The teacher, Sister St. Michael, began with eleven pupils.

Still another good work undertaken by the Nuns was the care of the sick. Justly was their Convent known as the Sacred Heart Hospital. For half a century there has been a welcome there for

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the many diseases which afflict the poor Indians of the North. Many afflicted persons have found shelter for long years under that hospitable roof. There one might have found Blind Margaret, Lidwine the paralytic, the Little Fool, and many another. The Little Fool, who was partially paralysed, had been abandoned on the shore by his father, one of the Slave Indians. He was found by the Sisters of Charity, and brought home. For twenty years they took care of him, doing all that they could to relieve his mental and corporal infirmities. When the Little Fool was vexed, he would race on all fours to strike his devoted nurses. But their long-continued patience and kindness almost succeeded in making him obedient, and in teaching him something of religion.

The sick Indians, especially in the first years, were very savage still, especially in their language. But the devoted Sisters schooled themselves to make allowance, to understand, and so to forgive. In the Hospital of the Sacred Heart they once had an old man who, in time of famine, had eaten his wife and his four children. He was in hospital, because feeble and paralysed, no longer able to go to the hunting grounds. The Infirmarian Sister spent a long time instructing him and preparing him for eternity. The day before his death, he called her, and said confidentially, "If I had a little



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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human flesh, I think it would do me good."

The Indians, were, of course, the chief care of the Sisters of Charity in Mackenzie. But the sick of any other race, and of any religion, were also welcome to their charitable services. One night in 1899, during the mad rush to the goldfields of the Klondike, the Sisters were roused in alarm by the noise of tables and chairs upset, and someone falling on the floor, and rising to fall again. It was an unfortunate miner, whose legs had both been frost-bitten in the melting snow. When about to give himself up for lost, like so many others, he noticed a house by the river side. He had dragged himself there, but could only lie upon the floor, groaning. By the skilful care of the Sisters, he was sent away cured.

Besides the inmates of the Hospital, sick people in their own huts or homes were also cared for by the Nuns, as they are still. Every day the Sister Superior may be seen leaving the Convent, carrying, under her grey cloak, medicine, lancet, lint, and hot water, and passing in the snow from tent to tent, from cabin to cabin, from ulcer to ulcer, bringing to each sufferer a remedy along with the encouraging smile of the true Sister of Charity. And when death comes, how genuine is the grief, how sincere the sympathy! The Nuns have seen many of those epidemics which, from time to time,



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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visit and decimate the Red Indian tribes, not sparing even those children who seemed to be safe within the convent walls. Over such little ones, whose bodies they had to commit to earth, after preparing their souls for heaven, the Nuns have wept as lovingly, and as long as any mother.

The following lines are taken from a letter written by Sister Beaudin, on November 21, 1903: "Soon after dear Sister Boisvert left us, an epidemic, coming from the Good Hope district, further north, was raging here. Not one of our fifty-four children escaped it. At first we did not think it dangerous, but we soon saw our mistake. After measles, came scarlet fever, diphtheria, and dysentery. It was heartbreaking to see so many children all at the same time bound on a bed of suffering. We watched over them by day and by night. It pleased God to afflict us by ten deaths. Three of the boys, and seven of the girls were carried off. One of the little girls died whilst making her thanksgiving after her First Communion. We are very sad, and yet we can envy the holy deaths granted to those dear children."

The one obstacle in the way of doing so much for the orphans and the sick was the utter poverty in which the Nuns themselves had to live. Mother d'Youville had often said, "Our Sisters ought not

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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to have more comfort than the poor." The Sisters at Providence could well afford to be judged by so severe a doctrine. We find that until 1899, when the present Convent was opened, the children slept in berths, like the shelves of a bookcase, ranged one above the other from the floor to the ceiling. These curious constructions, said to have been made by Bishop Faraud, ought to be preserved in memory of old times. In this children's dormitory, of which we speak, the one free corner was occupied by the Sisters' beds, laid side by side. One of the Sisters, however, had to sleep on a table on the ground-floor, so as to keep the fire burning all night. For a long time, in the beginning, the Sisters could not have the clothing of which they had need. Grey habits might be seen, which had been made of canvas.

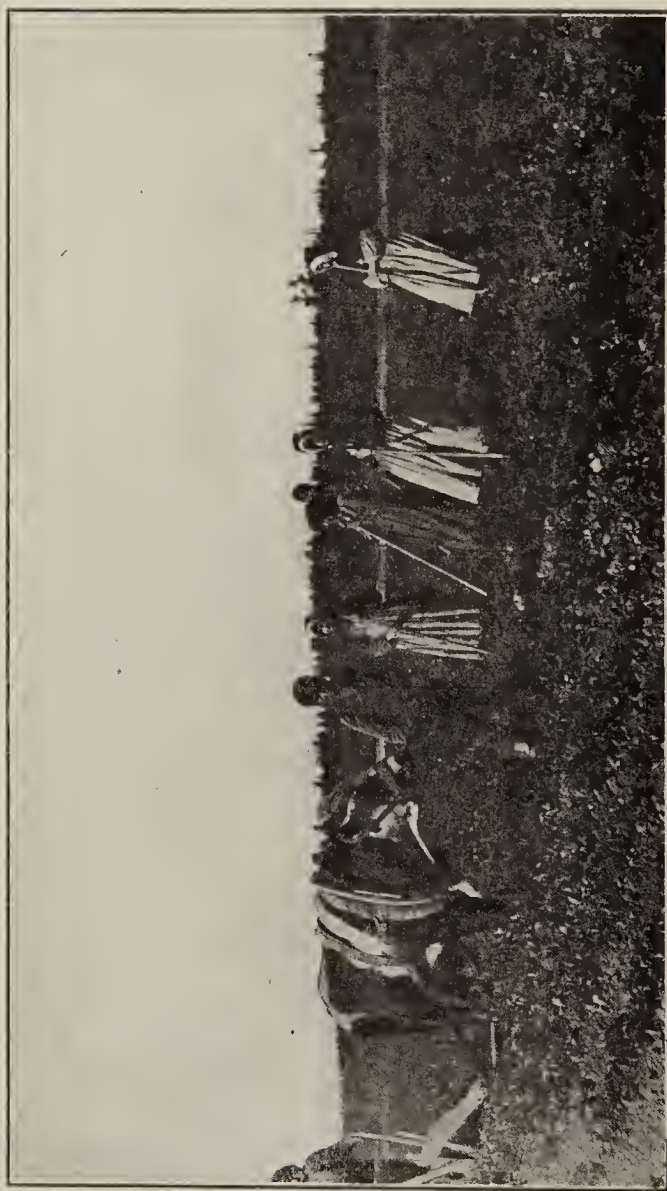
Telling something of those hard times, one of the Sisters, who has been at Providence since 1884, said lately with a quiet smile, "But we did not let them know at the Mother House: we were afraid of being called back."

The Providence foundation was already twenty-six years old, and was making progress (!), when Mother Stubinger wrote as follows, in the report of her visitation there: "One's heart is crushed, and again one's heart is enlarged, in such a place as this. Only an eye witness can understand things.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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IN THE FIELDS, FORT PROVIDENCE.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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At first, I thought the Sisters looked pretty well; but I find they are all very delicate. Their courage and generosity are beyond all praise. They are cheerful and gay even in the refectory, for them a place of special mortification. Three times a day, the same two dishes are laid before them, fish and potatoes. A little cake, of the size of a Boston biscuit, is called the dessert. Only on great festivals they may have a little rice, and dried apple, or wild berries. Game has almost disappeared from this country. During my stay of a fortnight, ten geese were the only thing killed. Even fish has become scarce. To find a winter supply, it is necessary to go a distance of forty miles. For this winter supply, that is, to give everyone something to eat, though not at all enough, at least 21,000 fishes must be stored. To add to the local misfortunes, there has been a plague of locusts. In ten days, since I have been here, they have eaten up the fruits and vegetables which, with great difficulty, had been grown here. We have tried, without success, all possible means to get rid of the grasshoppers. My heart is full of sorrow, day after day, as I see our poor Sisters left without even the necessaries of life." Mother Stubinger, after her return to Montreal, was sometimes seen to be weeping in the refectory. She was thinking of those whom she had left in the Far North.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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In 1885, Sister Ward wrote at Providence: "The potato crop has been very poor. The barley field has been ruined by the locusts; also the wheat, last year's crop having been destroyed by the frost. The thick ice gathered on the lake, before the necessary fishing could be completed. Yet we are now eating fish three times a day since the middle of August. There is not a morsel of meat in the house. We are keeping Lent by anticipation, and a Lent of which we cannot foresee the end. However, our fish diet is really good, and we eat it with such good appetites that we are likely to die of old age. All our vegetables have shared the fate of the wheat and the barley. Dear Sister Brunelle, after lavishing on them what may be called a mother's care, had the consolation of bringing home one carrot! The onions alone remain: it appears they were so bad that the locusts disdained them."

So we see that agriculture in the North has other enemies besides the frozen ground, and the freezing blasts. Besides the locusts, sometimes come the caterpillars. A letter of 1879 says: "The sowing was all over by May 24. We were congratulating ourselves on having finished so soon, when Father Lecorre came to tell us that there were thousands of caterpillars in the barley. They set to work about ten o'clock in the evening, and hid in the ground at sunrise. They destroyed the two fields of barley."



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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No barley meant no soup, and no coffee, for the year then beginning. Barley was used to make both soup and coffee, quite according to the Kneipp prescription, and of course without sugar, which is still a luxury in the North. This soup is the subject of an interesting note written in his journal by the Father Superior of the Providence Mission on August 21, 1903: "There is no more dried fish, and from the river we can hardly get enough for one meal a day. We must live upon soup."

The heaviest trial of all came in 1881-2. In spite of silence about sufferings, in spite of the hopes for improvement which the optimists of the Convent mingled with the reports which duty obliged them to send to their Superiors, the true state of the case became only too well known, and an order came to abandon the Convent. "It is a martyrdom of the Sisters," the document said: "there is no hope of their being able to live there; they must withdraw."

The bearer of the fatal message was Brother Larue, who was sent from Lake Athabaska, on May 16, 1881. The Brother was to make all haste, so that the Nuns might be able to take their passage on the next boats coming from Fort Simpson, on the Mackenzie. But the Brother's canoe was so delayed by floating ice, first at Fort Smith, and then at Great Slave Lake, that he reached Providence



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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only on June 28. Great was the distress there. In the Convent the Nuns were weeping. Outside, the Indians and Half-Breeds were declaring they could not allow the departure of those who were the Mothers of their sick, and of their young orphans. All the Protestants of Fort Providence were deeply grieved. It was a relief to all when the boats from Fort Simpson arrived two days after Brother Larue had brought the letter. It was evidently impossible to be ready to close the Convent, and leave the place on such short notice. It was evidently necessary to wait for the next sailing, which would be in another year. So it was arranged that Sister Charlebois, the Mother General's Assistant, who had spent the winter at Providence, would go aboard by herself, and would tell them at Montreal to expect all the Nuns in the following spring.

Meanwhile, the news reached Mr. Camsell, the chief official of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Simpson, and he told the Nuns that there would be no room for them on the Company's boats, if they wanted to go away for good.

"But," they said, "we are under orders."

"Well, let them come and fetch you."

"But, if we cannot live here? Our poverty makes it impossible," said the Nuns.

"We will bring you, carriage free, all that your friends send," was the offer in reply.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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The Nuns could only say: "There will be another letter from Montreal, ordering us to return without fail."

"No!" said the friendly Protestant gentleman; "all letters pass through my hands, and no such letter shall reach you."

All these objections would have had to be over-ruled somehow, if religious authority so required. But they made a great impression, and they increased the sorrow of one and all. The autumn and winter of 1881-2, were a prolonged agony. Father Lecorre got the children to pray to God for the decision which all desired. Father Ladet, being asked to help in packing up, said, "No! God Almighty will not permit your departure. The Sisters are doing too much good here; their going away would be too great a misfortune; they cannot go, and I am sure they won't go; I will pack no boxes."

Meanwhile, everybody was trying to discover some new economies and privations, which might justify a reprieve.

One of the Nuns wrote at a later date: "We kept on imploring all the Heavenly Powers that the sentence might not be carried out. We had suffered so much in our frozen North, and we were so attached to our poor orphans, that we thought we could not now be happy elsewhere."

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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But of course the command that had reached the Convent had to be considered before all personal regrets and desires. One by one, the children would be sent away. One by one, as if a fresh fibre



THE FIRST CONVENT OF FORT PROVIDENCE (1867).

Sisters Marie-Anne, Michon, Ward, Yves, Brunelle, Augustine.

were being plucked from the heart, each piece of linen was folded, each piece of furniture was undone. Even before the breaking up of the ice, that is, long before the boats were due, everything was packed and ready, and the walls of the Convent were bare.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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One evening in March, 1882, the air rang with the tinkling bells of the dog-sled, bringing the post from far away. There was a Montreal letter for the Convent. In the Superior's trembling hands it remained a while unopened. She seemed like one praying that, if it were possible, the bitter cup might pass. "Open it," said the Oblate Father; "I am sure it brings good news: we have all prayed so much."

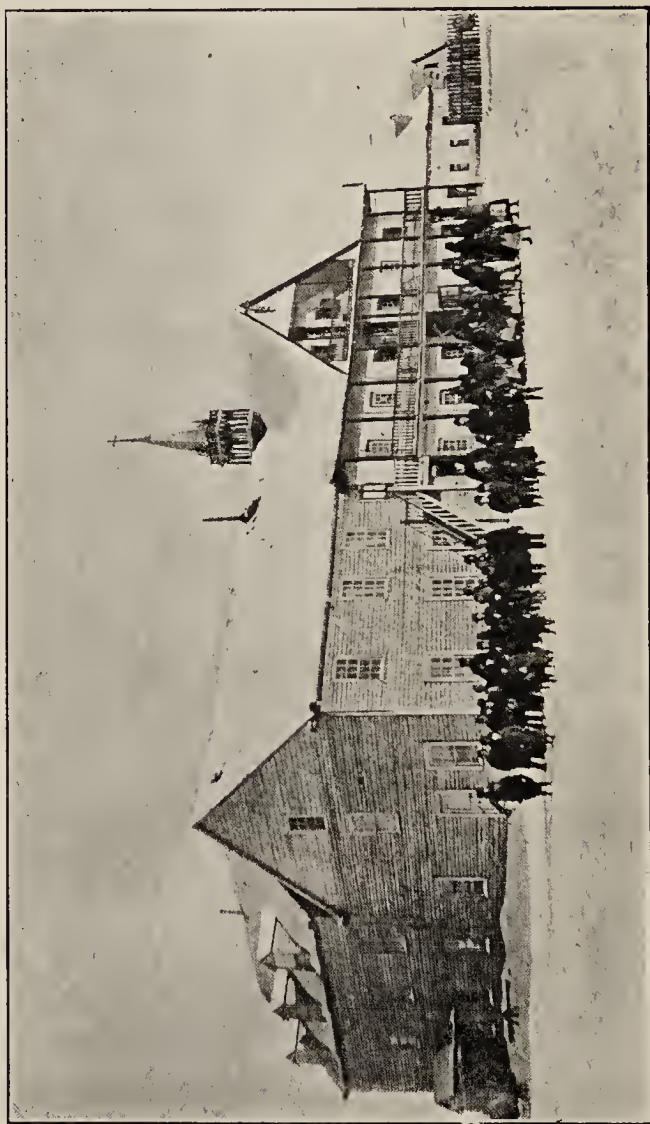
He was right. Mgr. Taché, hearing how things were, had promised to find additional help; Father Ducot had got money from his family in Bordeaux; Father Lecorre was to go to France to make an appeal for the Mackenzie Missions. The Nuns were to remain, and their number was even to be increased before long. Though Isaac was bound on the altar, God did not demand the actual sacrifice. The seemingly destined victim was spared, for the happiness of many generations.

The sufferings and privations of the Grey Nuns at Providence were by no means at an end. Nevertheless, things began to improve. The Canadian Government gave some help; a certain Bishop managed somehow to increase his contributions; and in our time the Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie is enabled to give their daily bread—real, literal, wheaten bread, be it understood!—to the Nuns and their young charges at Notre Dame de la Provi-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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THE NEW CONVENT OF FORT PROVIDENCE (1917), INAUGURATED IN 1899.



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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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dence. The present Convent is quite a fine and spacious building. It is the enlargement, by Mgr. Breynat, of the second Convent, which was built in 1899 by Mgr. Grouard. Let St. Joseph only provide fish from the Great Lake, and potatoes from the garden, and the Grey Nuns of the North will joyfully face the winters of another half-century, making very little of their sacrifice of all comfort and ease. They know they are working for the salvation of souls. They know they are the missionaries of the poor.

The Sacred Heart Hospital at Fort Providence, celebrated its Golden Jubilee, on July 3-6, 1917, with as much solemnity as was possible in the Far North. The Mother General of the Grey Nuns, Reverend Mother Piché, was present, having made the long and fatiguing journey from Montreal, along with the Secretary General of the Institute, Mother St. John Baptist. From all the Convents in the Mackenzie religious province came some representatives of the self-sacrificing Sisters ever busy therein. The *Te Deum* was chanted in the new Chapel, whose beautiful proportions were seen to great advantage in the clear northern light, chanted before the superb altar, presented by Canadian friends in honour of this Jubilee day. The Right Rev. Bishop Breynat, in a memorable ser-



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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mon, spoke of the hidden lives, the courage, the sacrifice, the perseverance of the Sisters of Charity, never failing during half a century, and under God's blessing bringing forth such marvellous fruit. The children of the Institution, in prose and in poetic song, told their gratitude and love for their good Mothers of the Convent, and for their Canadian and French and all other benefactors, of whom the Grey Nuns and the Oblate Fathers are for them the immediate representatives.

Reverend Mother St. John Baptist allows us to quote here some passages from the diary which she wrote during the Jubilee celebrations.

"July 4. Another banquet! Sister Ste. Eugenie, the Local Superior, had made all arrangements. The Indians of the Fort had been invited. Thirty of them came, and they evidently felt very proud and happy. The mothers, wearing a shawl, carried their little children on their back. A mother of twins had one on her back, and the other in her arms. At first I thought she was a hunchback, but the hump soon disappeared. This reminds me to tell you of a distraction I had at Mass this morning—yet a very touching sight. The Indian mothers bring their children with them everywhere, and, of course, to Mass also, not always to the comfort of the preacher. When these women are to receive Holy Communion, they let the Nuns

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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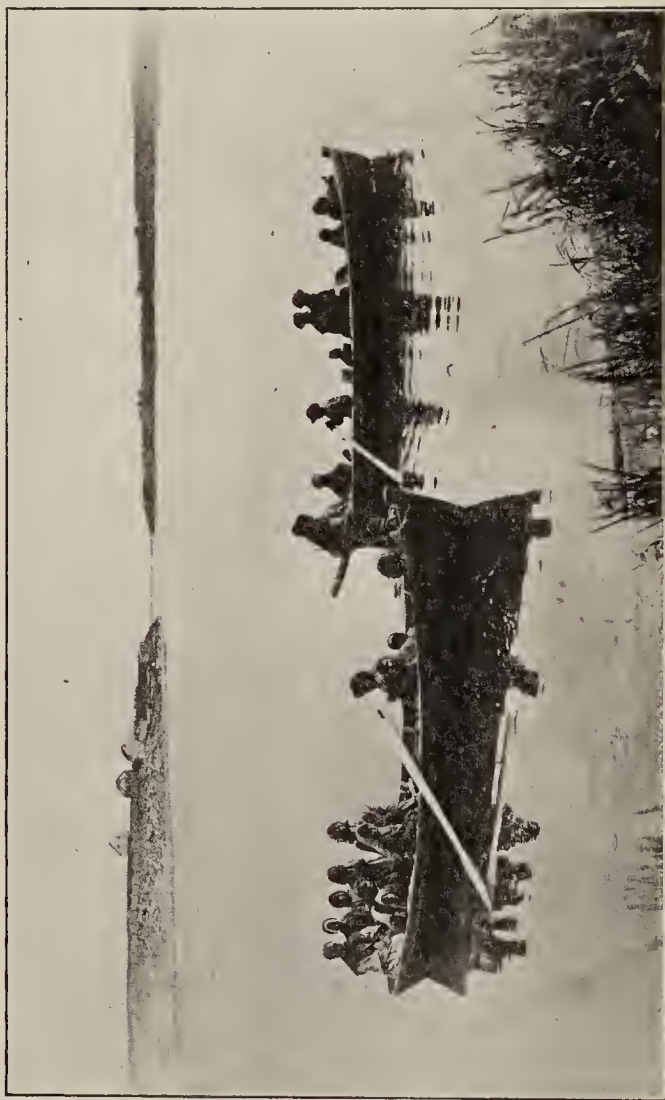
and the Convent children go first. Then, quite unceremoniously, they hand their children to the Nuns, and approach the altar rails. On their return they take back the babies, and squat down, with their shawls about their heads, praying very devoutly.

“But about our little banquet. The men sat at one side, the women at the other. The Bishop blessed the table, and then helped the guests. The Mother General took her part also, and she gave to each guest a holy picture and a blessed medal. The Indians had not expected so many good things. They had already dined before coming, but the plates were quickly cleared all the same. One mother, saying how she regretted the absence of her son, pocketed her own dessert of raisins and almonds for him, and helped herself from the plates of her obliging neighbours. Nearly all those Indians were old pupils of the Sisters, and it was very consoling to hear how they spoke of their youthful days in the Convent. Good old grandmother Bouvier was quite proud to tell that it was her children who were the first pupils of the Nuns at Fort Providence. She herself sang and danced for us. Her son, John Baptist, having been taught English and French by the Nuns, held an important position at the Fort, in the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company. He is now pensioned off. In

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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BOATING ON THE MACKENZIE, FORT PROVIDENCE.

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## THE SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

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our festive gathering, he made a speech, and proposed the health of the Mother General, telling of all the good done to the Indian people by her devoted Nuns, those who have gone to their reward, and those who have come to fill the void left by their departure. He told us that he had hoped that Mother Ward also might have come back from Eastern Canada for this feast day, and that he had prepared a special speech in her honour, as she is the survivor of the founders of the Hospital of the Sacred Heart."

To these grateful reported words of a Half-Breed, who was one of the eleven pupils of October 7, 1867, it only remains to add a testimony of very special value. In the Nuns' little parlour at Fort Providence, there is a Visitors' Book, of which the first page has been written by Bishop Breynat, the ecclesiastical Superior of the Grey Nuns of Mackenzie. The words of that devoted prelate will make the very best conclusion of this Chapter on the Convent and Hospital of the Sacred Heart.

"This house has done a great deal of good already. It will do still more as time goes on, making more and more progress with the blessing of Heaven. All visitors are struck with admiration at what they see here, in so remote a place. In the midst of my own anxieties and cares, it is always my greatest consolation when I can spend a day under

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the roof of this admirable religious establishment. I must add what I have said many times already, that this Hospital of the Sacred Heart has been and will continue to be, a source of many blessings, and of abundant vocations, for the whole Congregation of the Grey Nuns.

†GABRIEL, O.M.I.,  
*Bishop of Adramyttium,  
Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie.*"

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CONVENT OF THE HOLY ANGELS, NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA (1874)

OF the site and the prospects of the Convent of the Holy Angels, Lake Athabaska, Mother Stubinger wrote, after an official visit in 1893: "There is nothing to be seen here except rocks and hills. The Convent, perched high on a rock, looks like an eagle's nest. There is no ground that can be tilled. The patch on which our Sisters try to grow potatoes and barley was a morass, which was filled up with soil taken from the Lake at low water; it measures about half an acre. There is also a small island, on which it may be possible to grow about forty barrels of potatoes. So far for the temporal resources of the establishment."

This picturesque site, on the cliffs overhanging Lake Athabaska, at the distance of a mile from Fort Chipewyan, was chosen in 1847 by Father Taché, the founder of the Mission, which he called La Nativité. If he selected that particular site, it was for the very good reason that it would, after all, be easier to drain and fill a marsh, than to clear any portion of the surrounding woods.

The Nativity Mission is the oldest, and is still



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the most important, of all the Missions in the northern Vicariates. It is frequented by many of the Wood Crees, and by a still greater number of Montagnais. It is in regular communication with the other Mission, Fond du Lac, 175 miles away, at the east end of the Lake, in the hunting grounds of other Montagnais, known as the Caribou-Eaters. At Fond du Lac, there is also a considerable number of Half-Breeds.

For nearly thirty years, Nativity Mission had been making slow progress, until the Grey Nuns from Providence founded their Convent of the Holy Angels in 1874, seven years after their arrival in the Far North. The history of this foundation brings home to us the terrible isolation of those poor northern Missions, where the only *savoir faire*, the only guiding rule of life, has to be, "Do the best you can," or, as Mgr. Grandin preferred to express it, "Do the least badly that you can."

Mgr. Clut, Bishop Auxiliary of Mgr. Faraud, was at Nativity Mission during the winter of 1873-4. There he found that, for special reasons, a school had to be provided immediately and at all costs. To negotiate with the Mother General of the Grey Nuns would have taken a year at least. To communicate with Mgr. Faraud would have taken longer still, for he was then in Europe. Mgr. Clut prayed, and then decided for himself what

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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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he would do. He wrote in all haste to the Sacred Heart Hospital, begging and beseeching Sister Lapointe to send two Sisters to open a school at Lake Athabaska, and undertaking confidently to obtain the approval of the Mother General in due course.

For the Sister Superior to do as she was asked on this occasion was clean contrary to the Rules of her Order. But, on the other hand, the reasons were so urgent that delay seemed impossible. The Nuns, after considering and praying, thought that, in this particular case, they were not bound by the letter of their law. Father Grouard, who was then in charge of the Providence Mission, encouraged them in this view. On June 30, 1874, the boats from Fort Simpson were at Providence, on their way south to Lake Athabaska. Sister Lapointe, Sister St. Michael, and Sister Domithilda went on board. Father Grouard, whose health had completely broken down, travelled by the same boats. He was on his way to France, and he promised to justify in Montreal the decision to which the Nuns had come. Mgr. Clut had already written to the Mother General.

After three weeks in the boats, the foundresses of the new Convent reached Lake Athabaska, where they were received by Father Laity, who showed them into their new home. It was an old shed, on which some repairs had been begun. The

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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first meal consisted of dried meat softened with suet, boiled fruits and milk, all served in old tin porringers. For dessert, there were two enormous tarts, seasoned only by appetite, proverbially the best of all sauces. It did not take the Sisters long to make the acquaintance of their new house: they found one room, one table, and one pallet. To make a dormitory, the garret had to be cleared out. First a pitchfork, then a shovel, and lastly a broom did the work. The same implements were found useful on the ground floor.

In a week the new school was opened, and had fifteen pupils. The winter of 1874-5 was very severe. Snow as well as wind found easy entrance into the shed. The provisions for the year consisted of one sack of flour, one small barrel of sugar, five barrels of wheat, seven or eight of barley, and some potatoes. Bran cake was a standing dish. Of butter or dripping there was none.

But the Sisters engaged in this new venture were much more concerned about the expected decision of their Mother General than about the privations which they had to endure. On the Sunday after Christmas, it reached them by the hands of a special messenger. Rev. Mother Dupuis, Superior General, by her letter commanded the Sisters to leave Lake Athabaska at once. This order, accompanied with words of severe blame,

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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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gave the greatest pain to the poor missionary Sisters. The Rev. Mother had done her duty by upholding the Rule; the Sisters did theirs by keeping silence. At that particular time of the year, it was impossible for them to travel. Whilst waiting for the boats, they could only weep and pray.

To add to their sorrows, they learned how happy others had been made by their first Christmas at Lake Athabaska. Father Pascal (now Bishop) wrote to Bishop Clut: "In spite of our poverty, Midnight Mass was very solemn at Nativity Mission. Sister Lapointe worked wonders. The children sang beautifully, and in parts, with an assurance which would have done credit to any trained choir. Their listening parents wept tears of joy. Who indeed could fail to be moved by those angel voices hymning the praise of the Divine Child in the Crib? Our little church was crowded that night. All the Protestants of the Fort were present, including the schoolmaster. They remained also for the second Mass. The Sisters are most devoted to their work."

Was the fair prospect to be only a vision? Were the Indian children to be left untaught, according to the principles of their faith? One hope remained. Father Grouard had said: "I will go on my knees, if necessary: I will not return without

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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COMMUNITY OF THE HOLY ANGELS (1917), LAKE ATHABASKA.



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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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getting approval for what you have done." The Mother General's letter had been sent before Father Grouard reached Montreal. His pleadings with the Mother General, and with the Bishop of Montreal, Mgr. Bourget, were so powerful that he gained his cause. On February 26, 1875, a second letter from Montreal was received, saying that the new foundation was accepted, and that in May three Sisters would set out for the Convent of the Holy Angels. Hearty were the thanksgivings to God of all who were concerned. New efforts were made to turn the "temporary" Convent, the shed, into a more habitable sort of lodging. The inside was wainscotted as far as the window frames; some articles of furniture were made; everyone gave up all free time of day and night to preparing some kind of home for the expected Sisters.

On August 13, 1875, Sister Brochu, Sister Fournier, and Virginie Bernier, Franciscan Tertiary, arrived from the east, accompanied by Father Le Doussal. Except for two short absences, this venerable priest has continued, from that day to this, to aid and encourage the Nuns of Lake Athabaska in their holy lives and labours. The three new arrivals were soon busy, each at her own special work. Sister Brochu took charge of the ten little girls, Sister Fournier of the eight little boys,



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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and good Virginie of the kitchen. Virginie, now Sister Bruno, is at this present day still as busy as ever. Though 87 years of age, she attends all the community exercises in the Convent of the Angels; she is never tired of saying rosaries for everybody, nor of knitting stockings for the children. On August 23, Sisters Lapointe and Domithilda returned to Fort Providence, leaving Sister St. Michael as Superior at Lake Athabaska.

The so-called "temporary" house served the nuns for seven years. The only chairs it ever knew were planks set up on trestles. As for sleeping accommodation, one of the Nuns had the only bed (such as it was), another slept on a table, and the little girls, rolled in their blankets, slept on the floor near their teacher.

Mgr. Faraud used to say that nowhere had there been heavier trials than at Lake Athabaska—harder labours, longer fasts, or more destructive storms. The barrenness of the soil, the scarcity of game, the frequent absence of fish, and the very many storms on the Lake, explain the Bishop's statement. Quite lately, an Oblate Brother, whose face bears the marks of rude labours and sufferings, rather than of years, brought the present writer to the red rock, from which Father Laity, Father Pascal (now Bishop of Prince Albert), or Father Le Doussal, would anxiously look

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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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out to see if the fisherman of the Mission was not at last coming out of Lake Mammawi—an overflow of Lake Athabaska—bringing something for dinner. But sometimes wind and waves were so unfavourable that the fisherman could do nothing for a whole day, or for two days, perhaps for three days. Whilst he waited, the priests and Nuns had to fast. The tales which are now told by the survivors of those old times are almost incredible. When the two communities were dependent on the success of the Indians in hunting and fishing, what must have been their state in times of famine, when some of the Athabaska Indians became cannibals!

A letter from the Convent, dated July 15, 1879, said: "Our crops do not promise well. There is want already everywhere, but here more than elsewhere. In a whole year we have had only one moose, and two caribous."

In 1884, Sister Lemay, the Superior of the Convent wrote: "Our trials do not grow any lighter. This year, to add to our other privations, it pleased God to leave us without potatoes. After sowing thirty barrels, we gathered only thirteen barrels of very small ones. The frost had destroyed all the rest. The consequence is that we can eat none. All will be required for sowing in the next season. Our wheat and barley have also suffered much from the frost, both in quantity and quality. If the priva-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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tions are much felt by all, both in the Mission House and in the Convent, they are felt most by the newcomers. Poor Sister St. Charles is quite exhausted and ill. During her first weeks here, it was pitiful to see how much she was suffering from violent headaches. Her chest also troubled her, and its pains were increased by frequent vomiting. She did her best to overcome her repugnance for the pemmican, or dried meat, but her stomach could not bear it. She suffered more than any of us from having so little bread to eat. I obliged her to take more than our ordinary rationed portion, although fearing that our supply would soon disappear. The change did her good. But she would have much preferred to differ from the other Sisters only by enduring greater privations."

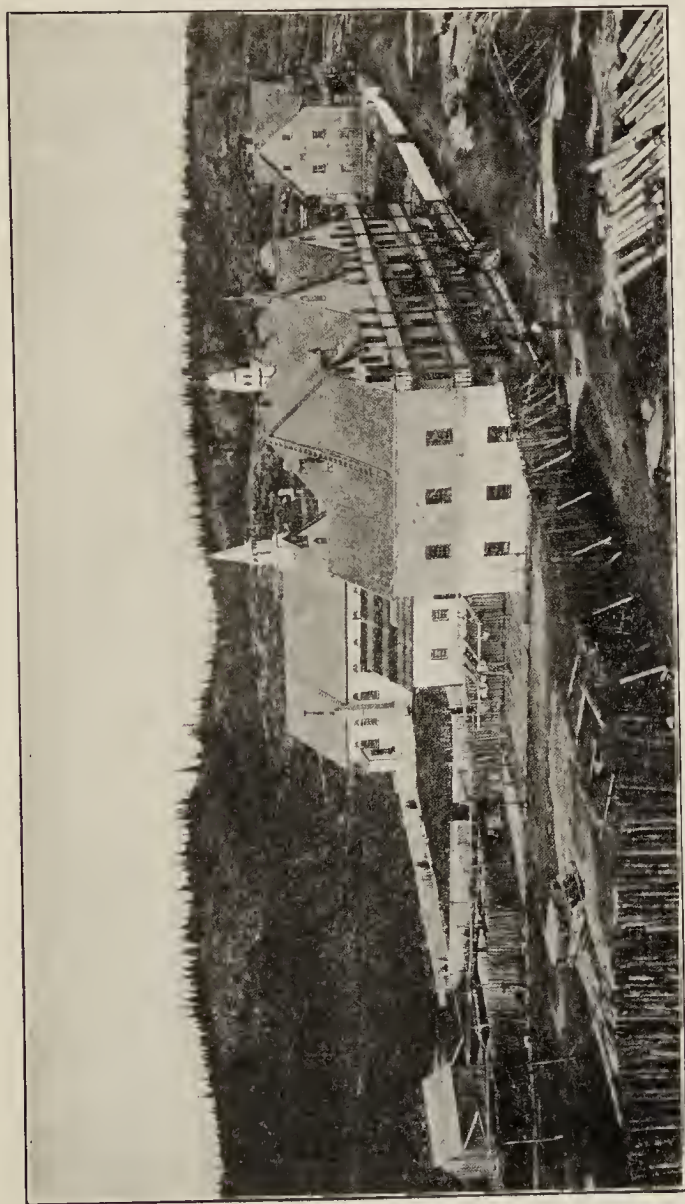
In the following year, 1885, this was the reckoning: "A bushel of turnips, half a bushel of carrots, two gallons of little peas, saved from the mice, a hundred bags of potatoes of very poor quality, a wretched crop of beans and onions, the little wheat that we sowed, ruined by the frost."

In such circumstances we can well imagine what joy there was over the least success in getting anything to grow. A Convent chronicle of January 2, 1902, said:—"Our garden has grown seventy-five heads of cabbage (rather small), a sack of beet, thirty ears of wheat, thirty-two tomatoes, five

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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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MISSION OF THE NATIVITY, LAKE ATHABASKA (1917).  
The Convent in the foreground—further back, the Church and the rectory—  
to the left the marsh drained by Bishop Faraud, O.M.I., and converted into  
a garden.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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bunches of celery, some cucumbers, a melon; half a bushel of onions, some turnips, lettuce, and radishes, as well as some flowers for the decoration of the altar. 'The best of all is that Sister Jobin is in such high spirits, and so full of determination to try again next spring. It must be remembered that nearly all the things mentioned are now making their first appearance at Lake Athabaska. Last year, Sister Brunelle said she had not tasted a cucumber before for thirty-four years, Sister Superior for eighteen, Sister St. Peter for seventeen, and so for the rest.'

But the reader will say that at Lake Athabaska there was, at all events, plenty of water, the precious liquid of which the great Foundress, St. Theresa, desired there should always be an abundant and pure supply. Well, the fact is that, whilst the Lake looks clear as crystal in the distance, it is muddy and dirty wherever the water can be drawn. A letter from the Convent says:—"In the middle of July the water was very low, to our great inconvenience both in kitchen and in laundry. Various fruitless attempts were made to purify the water. Our tea, for which it had to be used, was literally disgusting."

On this point, however, it is pleasant to be able to add that during the last few years the Nuns and their schoolboys, by means of pick and shovel, have



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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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got down through the rock as far as the filtered water of the Lake. *Deo Gratias.*

It is not our purpose to publish here any account of the travels of the missionary Sisters of Athabaska. There is not one of them whose experiences were not as varied and as trying as those of their Sisters at Fort Providence. The seventeen volumes of the Circulars of the Grey Nuns contain many letters written from the rock over Lake Athabaska, whilst the impressions of the writers were still quite fresh. These letters are full of charm even for one who knows by experience the wild countries described, and the dangers through which travellers have to pass. Still more attractive would they be to all readers at a distance.

The travels of the Nuns were, of course, usually only those that came in the way of duty and obedience. But, even in the bleak North, where there are pupils, there must be occasionally a little outing of another sort. Sister Dufault, one of the "old hands" at Lake Athabaska, has left us an account of one of those school picnics, which we must do ourselves the pleasure of quoting here. In the North, the devil is called "The Old Grey One," and it will be seen that he meddles even with innocent amusements, but that he can be driven away by appeals to someone stronger than himself.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Sister Dufault wrote as follows from Lake Athabaska: "For Sept. 11, 1900, the feast day of Mother Vicaress, we had prepared a real holiday. We had a picnic on Goose Island. At 8 a.m. everybody belonging to the Mission was on board the *Saint Joseph*, which took us to the island in a little less than two hours. The day passed very pleasantly. At supper, we saw clouds begin to gather, and we made haste to pack up, and to weigh anchor. We had not gone far when the wind rose, and we were soon in the thick of a storm. Everyone was seasick, and the boat was tossing terribly. I had never seen such waves, and yet we were not out on the open lake. We were so afraid that we decided to turn back, not only on account of the danger, but because there was not wood enough for the boiler, and the boat was making very slow progress. To make matters worse, the skiff which we had in tow got broken, so that we could not land. We had to anchor for the night. So well were we "rocked in the cradle of the deep" that no one could sleep a wink. It was very cold, and we had no blankets. Of course the children were all in the hold, trying to get some rest. What a long night it was, and how welcome was the day! We were hoping to turn our face homeward. But a strong wind was still blowing, and on board there was nothing to eat. Yes, there was one sack of flour!

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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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But now another misfortune. We had anchored close to land, and before we noticed it we had been left high and dry. The Brothers and the boys worked all day, trying to push off. All in vain: it seemed certain that we should have to wait for



READY?

high water, which might not come for some days. We had been invoking our Venerable Mother d'Youville, and once more, whilst the men made a great effort, all cried out with one voice, "Venerable Mother d'Youville, come to our assistance." Suddenly, to the astonishment of all, the boat

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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glided into the water, to the accompaniment of a chorus of thanks to our intercessor in heaven. Brother Charbonneau placed the image of Mother d'Youville near his little steam-engine. All the day, Sister St. Peter and I were kept busy making little cakes, which were no sooner baked on a little stove than they were eaten. At 5 p.m. we were able to begin our journey home, where we arrived at 8 p.m. Sister Superior and Sister Jobin, who had spent a very anxious night and day, embraced us as joyfully as if we had been a year away. Assuredly, we are not likely to forget the trip to Goose Island.

It will be no harm to tell here of another picnic,—to the Myrtles—to which the present writer was invited by Father de Chambeuil in 1915. Sisters Dufault, Laverty, and Saint-Cyr were present. Brother Courteille was in charge of the engine, and Brother Crenn was the man at the wheel. We steamed towards Lake Bocket (Jackfish), which makes one with Lake Athabaska twenty miles away from the Mission. The bright sun was mirrored in the beautiful lake as we set out very gaily. But the laughter and song of the school-children came to a sudden stop—upon a sand-bank! It was only in the evening of the next day, after running aground in a few other places, that we finished the last eight miles of our journey. When we came

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## NATIVITY MISSION, LAKE ATHABASKA

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back to the boat from our myrtle oasis, it was in torrents of rain, and with a hurricane raging in our ears. Our boat, the *Saint-Emile*, was as fiercely buffeted by the waves as the *Saint Joseph* in 1900. Against wind and wave, and rain and sleet, our little craft struggled and manœuvered for three days in making the twenty miles of the return journey. At last, on the Saturday evening, in a temperature five degrees centigrade below zero, whilst the snow was thickly falling, on the fourth day after September 8, the patronal feast day of Nativity Mission—the latest day appointed for our return—we drew into the neighbourhood of the rock of the Holy Angels. Undoubtedly, our Wild North Land makes its friends pay very dearly, even for their pleasure outings.

No matter: that winter there were 700 lbs. of excellent berries for dessert; no one fell sick; there were no coughs or colds; and everybody concerned began to prepare for the picnic of 1917, in honour of the Jubilee Year.

The Convent of the Holy Angels is in the Right Reverend Bishop Grouard's Vicariate of Athabaska, although it belongs to the Mackenzie province of the Order of the Grey Nuns. Without being altogether proof against sickness or shortcomings, it has reached a certain degree of pros-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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perity, so that it now receives many boarders, to whom it gives a sound and thoroughly Christian education. In some of our later pages, mention will have to be made both of the trials through which the Lake Athabaska Convent has passed, and of the success with which, by God's blessing, it has overcome them all.



## CHAPTER VII.

### ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE, FORT RESOLUTION, GREAT SLAVE LAKE (1903)

FOR a long time, the Sacred Heart Hospital and the Convent of the Holy Angels were the only establishments of the Grey Nuns in Athabaska-Mackenzie. But the year 1901, when the two dis-



FORT RESOLUTION (GREAT SLAVE LAKE) IN  
SUMMER TIME.

tinct Vicariates were formed, was the beginning of a new era in the missionary work of the Nuns in the vast spaces of the North.

The first foundation of this modern period is the handsome Hospice of St. Joseph, built on the

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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shore of Great Slave Lake, of which mention is made so often in connection with the Missions of the Far North. From the Convent porch you can see that part of the Lake on which Bishop Grandin, lost in a snow-storm, spent the night of December 14-15, 1863, accepting with resignation what seemed certain death, after hearing the confession of the little boy who was his only companion.

St. Joseph's Mission, Fort Resolution, was founded by Mgr. Faraud, who planted the Cross there in 1852. On his very first visit, he baptized 168 Indians. Those Montagnais had already, in 1848, sent a deputation to Father Taché at Lake Athabaska, saying on behalf of one of their oldest men, "Make haste to come, for my head is now white, and I do not want to die without hearing the good words of your lips."

Father Gascon, O.M.I., who died at St. Boniface in 1914, aged 87 years, and Father Dupire, who is still very much alive, were the pillars of St. Joseph's Mission during the 45 years between 1858 and the arrival of the Nuns. It was Father Dupire, O.M.I., who had the honour of welcoming the first Grey Nuns in 1903, after he had been in charge of that Mission for a quarter of a century.

Fort Resolution, which is the rendezvous of a great many good Catholic Indians, was one of the best sites that could be chosen for a Catholic school.

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ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE

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RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP GABRIEL BREYNAT,  
O.M.I., D.D.  
Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Mgr. Breynat, the first Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie, lost no time in begging the Reverend Mother Hamel, at Montreal, to come to his assistance. The good Nuns hearkened to the appeal, and were content with the same old conditions as their predecessors: to pray, and work, and fast, as in partnership with the Missionary Fathers.

Sisters Boisvert (Superior), G n reux, McQuillan, Honorine, and Ernestine left Montreal on April 20, 1903, and on June 16 reached Great Slave Lake, on board the *Saint Alphonsus*, accompanied by Mgr. Breynat and Fathers Duport, O.M.I., and Laperri re, O.M.I. They were received by the people of the place with affection and curiosity. But one of the Indian women said that a red habit would have been much prettier!

The Bishop and the Nuns, as they approached the landing place, were greatly surprised to see only the frame-work of a house, where they expected to find a Convent not only roofed in, but quite ready for occupation. "We did not know you were coming," were the first words they heard.

The explanation was soon discovered. When going to Europe in the summer of 1902, Mgr. Breynat told Father Dupire that if he succeeded in getting the Nuns to come in the spring, he would send him word to push forward the completion of the Convent with all speed. In case no such mes-

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## ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE

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sage came, Father Dupire was to attend to other pressing work during the winter. The Bishop having gained his point at Montreal, wrote at once; but the letter reached Fort Resolution a month later than the Nuns themselves.

This was how it came to pass that the Nuns who were to found St. Joseph's Hospice began in greater poverty and misery than any of their Sisters. At Providence the first Nuns had found some sort of house ready for them; at Lake Athabaska they had, after all, a shed for their own use; at Fort Resolution they had to be content with a borrowed garret.

Sister Boisvert, wrote back to the Mother House: "On June 16, we reached at last our promised land. Our first visit was to the Church, to adore our Divine Master, and to make an offering of ourselves for all the work that we might be able to do for his glory, and for the salvation of souls. We gave thanks also to God for having brought us in safety, through all difficulties and dangers to the very end of our journey. The fatigue, the bad weather, the cold, instead of prostrating us, seemed to give new strength to those who had none, and to improve the health of those who were already fairly robust. The only exception to this rule is little Sister Ernestine. She has been unwell all the time, not being able to retain any nourishment. At St.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Albert, she seemed to improve, but, as soon as we started off again, she was greatly troubled by what we thought at first to be a mosquito bite, but is really much more serious. I am making this dear Sister rest, and am taking care of her as best I can.

“To our disappointment, we are not in our Convent. The building is not at all ready yet. We hope it will be finished by the beginning of August. Meanwhile we are installed in the garret. We could not have begun in greater poverty. Is it not a good sign?”

The hovel in which the poor Sisters had to lodge was the place in which the harness for the dogs, the sledges, and various implements, were kept. It was also the storehouse for the dried meat and fish, and the other provisions, and like all such houses in the Mackenzie country, it was swarming with mice. It was four feet in height, and the Nuns went on their knees to reach the little couches assigned to them. In such a home, they spent those summer days which in the North are as hot as if the country never knew frost and snow.

On July 24 came deliverance. The Oblate Brothers, freed from the *Saint Alphonsus*, after the annual visits to various out stations, had been busy on land. By July 23 they had begun to lay down the flooring. At 4 p.m. the next day, the Nuns were installed in their Hospice, with three little girls,



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## ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE

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and two little boys, given to them that very day by their Indian parents, who were returning to the woods for the winter. The new house had as yet no rooms, and no partitions. Blankets were hung up to serve instead. And the way "upstairs" was by means of a ladder.

The first thing to be done for school children in the North is to give them a thoroughly good wash-



LITTLE DOG-RIBS INDIANS, AT PLAY.

ing. The poor blear-eyed little creatures arrive in rags, and filthy rags, crawling with vermin. An hour later you would take them for pretty little white children. But they have first to be made white! And how they dread their first bath! On July 24, Sister Honorine, taking a child out of the bath, left him down quietly in a heap of chips,

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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whilst going one step to find a little article or two to put on him. The one step was enough. When she turned round again, the carpenter's shavings were in motion, and the little Indian was making a bee line for liberty and his native woods. Fortunately, one of the Brothers caught him before he had gone far, and brought him back to have a chance of losing his fear of clean water, and clean clothes.

By degrees the new Convent got into working order, and began to have some furniture. But there was much opportunity for mortification. Father Dupire writes in his chronicle of events: "On August 30, Brother O'Connell set up the stoves in the Hospice, where the Sisters had been shivering with cold, for their house admitted the too fresh breezes on all sides. God alone knows what immense treasures of merit those good Sisters acquired in the trying circumstances in which they were placed. I certainly did all that was possible—and impossible—to spare them so much suffering, although they bore everything not only with courage and patience, but with a smile on their lips. No one has more reason than I have to recognize their pre-eminent worth as auxiliaries of the Missionary Priest, and to appreciate their self-abnegation and devotedness."

For six years, their first house—twenty feet by

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## ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE

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thirty—served the Nuns as their Hospice of St. Joseph. Even three years would have been too long. Father Mansoz, who was Father Dupire's assistant when the Nuns arrived, tells us of what he saw with his own eyes. "The temporary building accommodated five Nuns and twenty-five children, for the first three years. But when there were nine Nuns and forty-five pupils, the conditions were no longer tolerable. In the day-time it was not too hard to find room for all. But at night it was pitiful, though marvellous, to see how the little ones were stowed away in regular lines, some of them on tables or in cupboards, only one corner of the house being reserved for the Sisters themselves. God Almighty must have watched specially over those poor orphans and their guardians. But it was high time to do something to improve their position. Work was pushed on with extraordinary haste, and by December, 1909, the new convent had been built, as well as a house for the Bishop."

Between 1906, when Father Mansoz, O.M.I., was placed in charge of the Mission, and December, 1909, wonderful was the amount of work put out of hand. The main building of the Convent called for 200,000 feet of timber, and the saw mill to prepare them had first to be built. Fathers and Brothers, following the Bishop's example, set to work with a will. In March and April, 1907, the found-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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ations of the mill were laid, in spite of intense cold. Beginning in the month of May, the mill attacked an enormous raft of 500 blocks of wood, and, as soon as the planks were ready, the Convent and the Bishop's house were begun.

Mgr. Breynat decided to build in the forest, because on the Mission property within the surveyed limits of Fort Resolution there would not have been room enough. A site therefore had to be cleared, and the foundations of the new buildings were laid by the Brothers before the winter set in.

In June, 1908, Brother O'Connell, Brother Kérautret, M. Gagnon, and some Indians or Half-Breeds resumed work. When winter came again they had to turn to other tasks, especially to the fishing, which was very unsatisfactory that year. The summer of 1909 had to pass without either Convent or Bishop's House being habitable. Yet all were longing to take possession of them.

"On All Souls' Day," Father Mansoz tells us, "work began again with almost feverish haste. The Bishop had come to the conclusion that it would be possible to occupy the new buildings before the year was out. He himself therefore, and the Fathers and Brothers, gave up their days to manual labour. The Sisters, on their part, during the last fortnight of November, were very busy removing

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## ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE

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and replacing, packing and unpacking, upsetting and re-arranging, in making the welcome change from the old house to the new. Day by day, the children in joyous groups carried their little load, feeling quite proud to be helping in furnishing their new palatial abode. The day of taking possession was a day of joy for all, since all had had a share in the toil which brought round that day so very soon. On the first Sunday in December, 1909, a Mass of thanksgiving was sung in the Convent Chapel. The feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, was, of course, a feast day. There was no need of toasts or speeches. The chattering and laughter of the children told eloquently enough the feelings that filled all hearts. And what a happiness to anyone with a missionary spirit, to succeed in bringing sunshine into our neighbours' lives!"

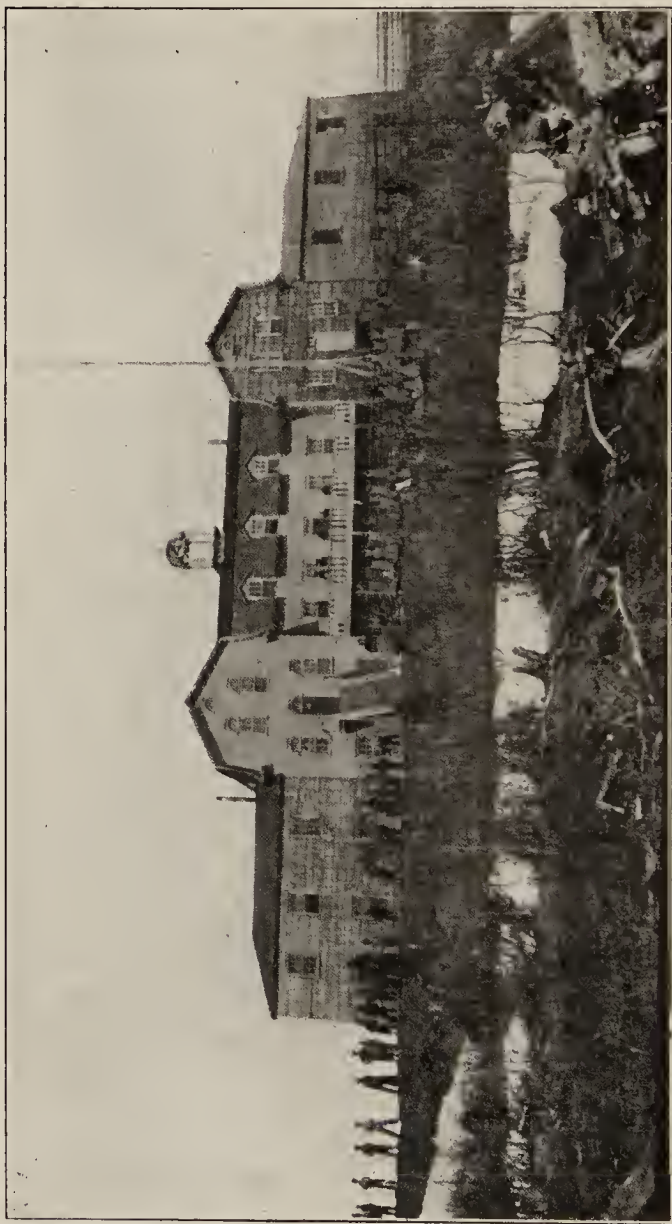
To the Mother House at Montreal Sister St. Albine wrote, in order to make others partners in the joy felt at St. Joseph's Hospice. "We have had great changes here," she said, "since the visit of our good Mother Vicaress. Sometimes we can hardly persuade ourselves that it is not all a delightful dream. But it is quite real: we have actually taken possession of our beautiful new Convent. When Mgr. Breynat returned from France, he pushed matters forward so rapidly that by the beginning



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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SAINT-JOSEPH CONVENT AND SCHOOL, GREAT SLAVE LAKE.



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## ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE

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of December we had begun to transfer our goods and chattels from the old house to the new. What a time of rejoicing and of giving thanks to God! Though there was no one who was not very fatigued, yet joy was written on every countenance. The Bishop himself looked like one from whose shoulders a heavy burden had been lifted at last. I cannot tell you how kind and generous this good Bishop is in our regard. When he had blessed our new house, he officiated at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, during which our hymns gave expression, out of full hearts, to our gratitude to God, and to our Blessed Patron and Father, St. Joseph, for the successful issue of an undertaking whose success might sometimes have appeared to be outside the range of possibility.

“Though our Convent is only half finished, it is quite comfortable. The rooms are large and well lighted. The little chapel is pretty and devotional. The heating apparatus works well, and makes us forget the rigour of our Arctic frosts. Even the flies and mosquitoes enjoy the warmth: they have come to life, and are buzzing around, thinking that summer is here. When the summer really comes, they will surely make us pay for our present comfort.”

Comfort in Mackenzie! Poor Sisters! They had not to wait for the mosquito season for their

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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penances. Even in a gilded cage there may be discomfort, and perhaps hunger. As a matter of fact, another communication to the Mother House ran as follows:—"We cannot take more children, not being able to feed them. Part of the fish supply of last autumn was spoiled in the thaw. The fishing under the ice just now brings in very little compared with our numbers. There have been no caribou this winter, and our provisions are exhausted. In our present critical circumstances we can only have recourse to our Protector, St. Joseph. Our distressful condition makes us feel more than ever that we belong to God alone. We are happy to be suffering something for the sake of the glorious work to which God has called us."

The chronicler of St. Joseph's Mission House has also left us an account of that sad time of distress, but he is able to wind up with prayer and praise in honour of the Nursing Father of the poor Mackenzie Missions. He writes: "The year 1910 was rich in crosses, especially the first four months. Fortunately, the Bishop was with us, to cheer us and guide us. Our storehouse was empty; even the mice seemed to mourn. The rations of the sixty children had to be made slighter than ever. Trusting in Divine Providence, we did all that was humanly possible for the relief of ourselves and our dependents. We had fifty fishing lines near the Ile

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## ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPICE

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aux Œufs (Egg Island), eighteen miles from the Convent; many also, with some nets, near the Brulé islands. These last were no good, but as the first did passably well, we continued fishing there until the end of March, the time when the carp appear in the Rivière au Bœuf (Buffalo river). After the annual retreat in February, Brothers Josso, William and Kérautret left for the shanties in the woods, whilst Father Duport and Brother Jean-Marie continued the fishing, bringing in on an average fifteen trout after each venture. As the only dogs they had were old ones, unfit for a good journey, our two fishermen suffered a great deal on the Lake. God bless their generosity and self-sacrifice. It was they who succeeded in keeping the children alive.

“The trout of our great lakes in the North becomes distasteful and unwholesome, when there is no variety. The children made a novena to St. Joseph begging him to send them a morsel of meat. On the great Patriarch’s feast day, March 19, we got half a dozen moose. Many were the thanksgivings. Great was the joy of all, and especially of the bursar, Father Duport, who once more saw his larder well stocked.”

Such are the little histories, hardly known except in heaven, which show us how the years pass

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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in suffering nobly borne, in the Missions of the Far North.

St. Joseph's Convent, at Fort Resolution, Great Slave Lake, is now a completed building. With its fifty windows or doors, on a front of 144 feet, with its handsome mansard roof, crowned with a belfry, on which a white cross shines, this Hospice of St. Joseph is the finest religious monument in the Mac-kenzie Vicariate. In this community ten missionary Sisters are now giving a Christian education to a hundred children, whom they have gathered out of all the woods which border the Slave River and the Great Lake.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### NEW FOUNDATIONS

*Fort Smith, Fort Simpson, MacMurray,  
The Eskimos (1914-16)*

FORT SMITH.—The Montagnais Mission of St. Isidore at Fort Smith is the threshold of the Mackenzie Vicariate Apostolic. It was founded by Father Gascon, who used to visit the place occasionally from Great Slave Lake. Its first resident priest—in 1888—was Father Jousard, the present Coadjutor of the Right Rev. Bishop Grouard.

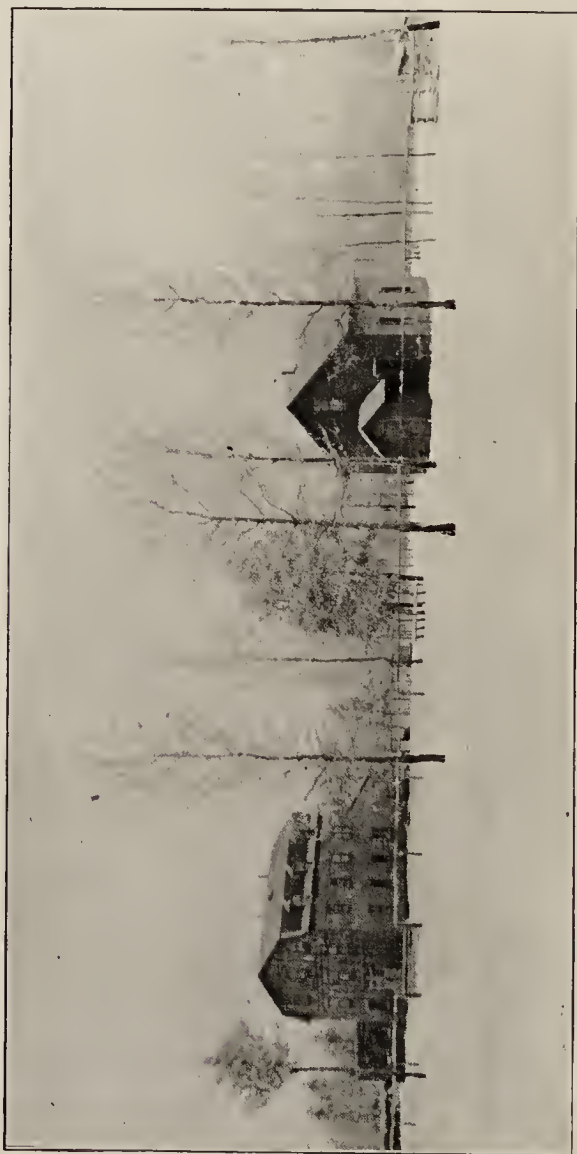
Fort Smith, on the Slave River, and almost on the northern border line of Alberta, is at the foot of the last of those rapids which hinder navigation towards the Arctic regions. By reason of its position, it is an emporium for the great waterways of Alberta and Mackenzie. What will it be in the future, when the natural resources of the North begin to be exploited, and when the inexhaustible water-power of that spot begins to be harnessed in the service of man? The Vicar Apostolic, the Right Rev. Bishop Breynat, having an eye for the times, has made it his care to establish a school and a hospital at Fort Smith. They are both in charge



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# THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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At Fort Smith in 1917.

HOSPITAL

SCHOOL

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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of the Grey Nuns—the Hospital since 1914, and the school since 1915.

The Foundresses are Rev. Mother Lèveillé, (Provincial and Local Superior), Sister Fortin, Sister Gadbois, and Sister Baudry, who after a while was replaced by Sister Jobin. The Nuns reached Fort Smith on the eve of the feast of St. John Baptist. The Hospital building had been barely begun. A small lean-to-shed was the Nuns' first residence. Their first patient got the Bishop's room in the Mission House. However, the saw mill at Fort Resolution had done good work; the planks were all on the ground at Fort Smith, and, under the skilful hand and eye of Brother Josso, the Hospital was very soon ship-shape.\*

On August 24, 1914, the Grey Nuns took possession of the present Hospital, which is meant to be the right wing of a large building. Father Manzoz, Superior at St. Isidore's, said the first Mass in the Hospital on September 8, the feast of the Nativity of our Blessed Lady. On the last day of 1914, he wrote: "Blessed be God for the success of this great and good work, the Hospital, which will be

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\*One of the principal workmen engaged upon the Fort Smith Hospital was Isidore Mercredi, a former pupil of the Lake Athabaska Convent, who became a first-rate carpenter and joiner as an apprentice of the well-known Brother Ancel, O.M.I.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the beginning of blessings and prosperity for the Mission at Fort Smith."

The Hospital was already too small in 1916, and it has lately been enlarged.\*

After the Hospital comes the school. The handsome little school at Fort Smith was opened on September 6, 1915, and it was filled from the very first day, to the surprise of all who were accustomed to Indian indifference.

Protestants as well as Catholics still flock in at the first sound of the bell, even though there may be, as sometimes happens at Fort Smith, 90 or over 100 Fahr. degrees of frost.† Nay, it appears the children enjoy their schooling! On January 24, 1916, the eve of the centenary celebration of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Sister Gadbois said to her pupils:

"To-morrow will be a great feast day; would you like to have a holiday, or to come to school?"

"School, if you please, Sister," they all said. The teacher on all such occasions since then contents herself with saying, "To-morrow will be a

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\*The first year's report of the Hospital mentions 1582 cases of bandaging or dressing, 1642 prescriptions by the doctor or the Head Nurse, 578 visits to the sick in their own homes, six surgical operations, and two deaths.

†At Fort Smith and Fort Resolution the Grey Nuns are in charge of a Government weather bureau, and of course they send in their most useful reports very regularly.

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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holiday," and the little red faces have to look resigned. The only time of the year disliked by Fort Smith pupils is the vacation. Now, what do our paleface scholars say to this?

Fort Smith, like other places in the North, is



AT DAY SCHOOL, IN FORT SMITH.

no stranger to privations. In the autumn, winter, and spring of 1915-16, the two religious communities there were left without potatoes, the bread of the poor. A great frôst in September had blighted the crop in the ground. Fortunately, the neigh-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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bouring Mission, St. Joseph's, Great Slave Lake, was well supplied that year. But this neighbourhood is 190 miles away, and it was only after nine months that it was able to relieve Fort Smith.

Fort Simpson.—Simpson, as it now begins to be called, is the heart of the Mackenzie district.

It is central between Fort Smith and the Arctic Ocean. It stands where the Liard River, rushing from the Southwest with a more impetuous current than the great Mackenzie itself, joins that broad river on the way to the North. The Liard brings to Simpson all the peltries of Fort Liard and Fort Nelson. For these reasons, Fort Simpson, under the Hudson's Bay Company, has been the centre of their Mackenzie district. Of the chief officials who succeeded each other there, many were of just, and even of liberal disposition, entirely worthy representatives of a Company styled "Honourable." But there were some exceptions.

In the nature of things, in such a centre as Simpson, so far removed from the ordinary resources of civilization, there could not but be some reasons for calling to mind the word Babylon. There was indeed in that place a great deal of lawlessness, of license, and of sin.

Father Grollier, O.M.I., in 1858 was the first



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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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Priest to visit Fort Simpson. By a happy inspiration, he dedicated the Mission there to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. See how the Sacred Heart has triumphed! After all the sadness and sorrow, and suffering of the missionaries—for a long time seemingly fruitless—they are now able to report that nearly all the Indians of that region are Catholic Christians, though they are not yet quite perfect!

Perhaps, in time to come, Simpson, like some other old "Forts," will become a commercial centre, and even a city. In that case, the Sisters will be on guard to forward the interests of the Sacred Heart.

In 1911 the Canadian Government established at Simpson an Indian Agency, to watch over the interests of the Indians, and to represent the Government in a great many public affairs. The first agent was Mr. Gerald Card, a gentleman whose justice and friendliness to the Catholics are an honour to the Protestant body. In 1912, Mr. Card consulted with Father Andurand, the priest of Fort Simpson, about the possibility of establishing there a General Hospital for the benefit of the Slave, the Hareskin, and the Louchoux tribes of the Lower Mackenzie. In July of the same year, Mgr. Brey-nat, passing through Fort Simpson, approved and accepted the proposal made. In 1914 he chose the site for the Hospital, and, that summer, Fathers



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Andurand, and Moisan, with Brother Kraut, and Mr. Ouellet, a young Canadian carpenter, laid the foundations of a three-storey building, forty feet by sixty. Mr. Card provided the timber, and rendered many other services. He also obtained from the Government in Ottawa the means of furnishing the Hospital.

In 1915 the Hospital was ready for occupation. By what was afterwards seen to be a remarkably Providential arrangement, the Sisters who were expected then failed to come.\* In 1916 they were installed. They were Sister Girouard (formerly Superior at St. Joseph's Hospice), Sister Boursier, Sister Latrémouille, and Sister Mary. Passing through Fort Providence, the Sisters brought away with them, to the new Hospital, many of the sick people whom they found there.

A few days after their arrival at Fort Simpson, namely, on August 15, 1916, they had the melancholy consolation of closing the eyes of the devoted apostle of the Hareskins, Father Ducot, whose forty-one years of missionary life had been divided between Fort Good Hope, Great Bear Lake, and Fort Norman. The Sisters at Providence had

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\*The furniture, and the dispensary outfit, for the Hospital were on board the steamer *MacMurray* (on which the Nuns were to have taken their passage), which was wrecked in the Peace river in July, 1915. It was only in 1916 that these losses to the Simpson Hospital were made good.

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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thought themselves under particular obligations to Father Ducot; he had taken a great interest in sending children from the more northerly posts to be placed under their care, and he had been very generous in 1881, in a way of which some mention has been made already. Leaving this world for Heaven—as we confidently hope—on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin whom he had always loved so ardently, and had taught the Indians to love, Father Ducot left after him as a blessing upon the infant establishment of the Sisters of Charity at Fort Simpson that most precious inheritance, the holy death of a servant of God.

The Hospital at Simpson, 160 miles down the Mackenzie river, and, therefore, further north, from Notre Dame de la Providence, is at this moment the most distant Mission station of the Grey Nuns. They have gone there in that spirit of ardent charity towards the poor, which they make the fourth of their religious vows. Such true Sisters of Charity will assuredly be the means of spreading the kingdom of God, the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, even in quarters where religion is now ignored.

MacMurray.—MacMurray, 184 miles south of Lake Athabaska, is at the northern extremity of the long chain of rapids of the Athabaska River. For a

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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long time, the missionaries could do no more than pay occasional visits to the very small population of Fort MacMurray. In 1906 there came a sudden change. Asphalt, petroleum, and the promise of other sources of wealth, brought commercial companies to MacMurray, and the population began to increase. It was decided to make a railway connection with Edmonton in the south.

The moment had come for a permanent Catholic Mission, with a resident priest, at MacMurray. Father Laffont, O.M.I., was, therefore, transferred from Nativity Mission, Lake Athabaska, and directed to found—in poverty, always—the parish that is to be. His parishioners were a mixed lot: whites of all sorts, and from all points of the compass; “Montagnais, religiously disposed, gentle, easily led, and very fond of singing hymns; Crees, superstitious, lazy, fond of dancing, and in church as mute as carp.” Father Laffont preached to them every Sunday in French, English, Cree and Montagnais. He had no need to make use of his Italian or Spanish.

When 1915 came round, he wrote: “The missionary wants to have a hospital here. Or rather, not he, not the priest, but the people, the parishioners. MacMurray is becoming what they call a hive of industry. This means machinery, and machinery means accidents. We must have a Hos-

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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pital, and we must have Nursing Sisters. Please to recollect that we are 300 miles away from all possibility of medical or surgical treatment. I have seen Nursing Sisters at work, and I know that with them we shall have a good hospital, and we shall be content."

Father Laffont continued in the same letter: "Now the children also must be considered. I seem to see our Divine Lord setting them in the midst, and caressing their innocent little heads. I want to give them Holy Communion, but they need much and continuous instruction. It may be asked if their mothers cannot instruct them. Perhaps in some cases. But some of them have no mothers alive. In other cases, the mother says she cannot do everything; she is toiling and moiling from morning till night. So we must have a school. We must have Catholic teachers, to speak to the children of God and holy things, and to make them learn to read their catechism, as the best of all books."

Once more it will be the Grey Nuns who will be the nursing mothers and the teaching mothers, hastening to the help of the sufferer and the child. The Convent at MacMurray will naturally become the Provincial House. The Sisters going there, in times to come, will complete in one day the journey of 300 miles, seeing only from cushioned cars

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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those cascades and roaring rapids of which some account has been given on an earlier page. These modern travellers will be sure to find at MacMurray the affection and calm of a second Mother House, from which, refreshed in spirit, they will



A GROUP OF MISSIONARY SISTERS OF MCKENZIE, 1916.

go forth, like their predecessors, over the smooth-flowing river and the stormy lakes, to give their services to the poor of Christ.

The future historian of MacMurray may perhaps be pleased to find in our pages the story of the



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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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way in which Reverend Mother Piché and her travelling companion inaugurated the famous Northern railroad in September, 1917. When on their way to the Jubilee festival at Providence, early in the spring of the year, they took train from Edmonton to the Peace River. Following that river, Rocher River, Slave River, Great Slave Lake, and the Mackenzie, they reached Fort Simpson. On their return journey, they took the same course reversed, except that they left on their right the Peace River, sailing instead by Lake Athabaska, and Athabaska River, as far as MacMurray, the advertised terminus of the new line. The journey had been very fatiguing, yet, without any of those accidents which give such a terrible reputation to the Wild North. The Mother General, having had incidents and accidents enough in 1912, was not sorry to have escaped so well in 1917. But Mother St. John Baptist, who wished to learn by experience all that her Sisters in the North have to suffer, seemed quite disappointed to have reached MacMurray, which, at present, would mean trains and civilization. But civilization itself came to her relief. The MacMurray terminus was twenty miles away, where the trains, if they ever arrived, stopped in the middle of the forest. The travellers had to go by boat eighteen miles on the little Clearwater River, which brought them

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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within three miles of the terminus. Eight miles of the little voyage were delightful. The banks of the Clearwater are enchantingly beautiful. Suddenly however all poetry was ended. The gasoline boat had not sufficient depth of water. The travellers had to change to a small flat-bottomed boat, which the oarsmen were sometimes obliged to drag with ropes. In those ten miles, within the supposed bounds of civilization, our two Nuns had to put up with more hardships than in the 2,220 miles which they had travelled in the preceding five months. At last, they were landed at the foot of a cliff, up which they had to climb, over a winding trail, by no means easy to negotiate. For three miles, the whole party had to march, usually climbing, through a primeval forest where the branches were very troublesome, and the mud like stickfast paste.

The train arrived in the evening, to begin its return journey four days later! The Nuns camped out in an open wagon during three very frosty nights. But their courage and good humour were edifying. One morning, when Mother St. John Baptist seemed to think the night had been cold, the Mother General laughingly said, "Ah, you wanted to be so brave last night: you would not take your precautions. Serves you right!"

At last the train started. It jolted along for four miles, over rails resting on the muskeg

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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(swamp). Then it stopped for the night. Next day it did fifteen miles, and then left the rails altogether. The first car lay at a very awkward angle. The guard sought a long time for help which never came. At last, as the engine and tender had kept the rails, the passengers were invited "on board" of these. Thirty persons took their places there, somewhat like gipsies in a caravan, though not in such security. The Nuns got the place of honour in the tender. At the first unsteady move of the engine, they received a full discharge of smoke and coal dust in the eyes. The wind was blowing the wrong way! It so continued for forty-eight miles. When the Nuns reached Lac La Biche Mission, they were like negroes. Their veils, and cloaks were very dusty, and their habits were no longer grey. All these particulars we have learned from their fellow passengers—Bishop Breynat, Fr. Lefebvre, and Father Falaize—who travelled on top of the coal.

The Eskimos.—In 1860, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, a day of special devotion with the Grey Nuns, Father Grollier, near the mouths of the Mackenzie, made an Eskimo chief and a Loucheux chief join hands in his, and swear, at the foot of the Cross, that they would henceforward live in peace with each other. It was a

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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triumph of religious influence over old customs of treachery and slaughter—a triumph on one side at least, for the Loucheux in great numbers have been made Christians.

For the Eskimo race, however, the day of conversion does not as yet appear to have dawned.

In 1892, though knowing of the failure of others, the youthful Father Lefebvre, O.M.I., made a new attempt to preach the Gospel truths to that deceitful and superstitious race. He hardly gained a hearing.

In a different part of the extreme North, in the "Barren Grounds" between Great Bear Lake and the Arctic Ocean, Father Rouvière, O.M.I., sent by Mgr. Breynat, found some Eskimos on the feast of the Assumption, 1911, and had some hope of doing good amongst them. In 1912 he was joined by Father Le Roux, O.M.I. In 1913 these two missionaries left Great Bear Lake with an Eskimo tribe, which they intended to accompany to the sea. Two men of the tribe brutally murdered the two Priests.

The murderers were arrested in 1916. According to the evidence collected by the brave men of the Northwest Mounted Police, under Inspector La Nauze, the murder took place at the end of October, 1913. The missionaries were on their way back from the Eskimo camp at Coronation Gulf, intending to spend the winter in their hut at Great

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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Bear Lake. They were followed by two Eskimos. Father Le Roux, who was with the dog-sledge, was stabbed in the back. The murderer, telling his companion to finish the paleface, then siezed the fowling piece, and shot Father Rouvière, who was



AN ESKIMO FAMILY OF THE BARREN LAND (THEIR SUMMER CAMP).  
Photo by M. Douglas, in "Lands Forlorn".

walking in front clearing a way for the dogs who were hardly able to drag the sledge. The murderers ate portion of the liver of their victims, saying it had always been the custom to do this in former times, whenever they killed a white man. The



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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place of the terrible tragedy was near Bloody Fall, on the Coppermine River, about fifteen miles from the Arctic Sea. Some remains of the victims were found there.\*

We may hope that God will bless the work in which the blood of his servants has been shed. Bishop Breynat does not at all give up the project of winning over the Eskimos to the knowledge of Christ. On September 14, 1912, Father Rouvière wrote: "I am still more hopeful than last year. The little I taught them they have remembered, and have even taught to others. If they persevere in their good dispositions, they will, in a few years, be as good Christians as our other Indians, or better."

But Priests are wanted! The Eskimos have killed only two. Not so the combatants in Europe. What gaps there are in the priestly ranks, and in scholastic houses! May the Divine Master deign

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\*There is another Eskimo Mission on the coast of Hudson Bay, at Chesterfield Inlet, in the Vicariate Apostolic of Keewatin. It was founded in 1912 by Fathers Turquetil, O.M.I., and Le Blanc, O.M.I. This Mission also has provided its victim. Father Le Blanc worn out in body and mind by the hardships of his position, was returning to the Bishop's house at le Pas in northern Manitoba when he was drowned. Mgr. Charlebois, O.M.I., wrote of him: "My Vicariate loses in him a devoted and most self sacrificing missionary. I look upon him as having fallen a victim to his zeal for the conversion of the poor pagan Eskimos. May his death along with that of Fathers Le Roux and Rouvière hasten the conversion of that unhappy race."

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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to send labourers into His vineyard, and remember all souls redeemed by his Precious Blood; and may he allow the blood that has been shed by cruel hands in the Northern snow to be turned into a dew of grace, falling upon the slayers and their brethren.

Yet Priests are not enough for the conversion of those distrustful, selfish, deceitful tribes, bravely forcing a livelihood from a seemingly hostile nature, on the very borders of the world. It would seem that teaching and preaching, on the part of the suspected white men, will never suffice, of themselves, to introduce civilized and religious notions among those poor types of humanity, whose present notions have been "bred in the bone" for generation after generation. Only the continued relief of their actual needs, and the needs of their children will find a way to their hearts. Only a personal devotion, lessening or removing their physical and moral miseries, will convince them of the truth of a new message, so different from the old. Nowhere in the world more than in the snow-houses of the polar regions do human pain and anguish need the ministry of the gentle hand, the tender heart, the soul so steeped in the love of God that it has taken on something of God's own love for repulsive and sinful creatures. Will not Mother Church, at all times the Nurse of the heroic, be able to supply the ministering angels who are needed?

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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The question has been answered already. The spiritual daughters of Mother d'Youville, the Sisters of Charity, the Grey Nuns of the North, are only waiting for the signal, to go still further North, even to the Dismal Lakes, and the Barren



HIS GRACE BISHOP BREYNAT, O.M.I.  
On a Pastoral Tour.

Lands, and the ice-huts of the Eskimos. These women, who labour in the Gospel, have already promised Mgr. Breynat, "the Bishop of the North Pole," that he may appeal to them once more with all confidence, and that they will be ready to set out

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## NEW FOUNDATIONS

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as soon as his call is heard. So it will surely come to pass that, through the spiritual children of the Venerable Mother d'Youville, and of Bishop de Mazenod, the ancient prophecy shall have fulfilment, and a new canticle may be sung to the Lord, because "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

The perpetual winter, the infectious igloos (or ice-huts), and the degraded condition of the poor Eskimos, do not frighten or fret the brave Grey Nuns. It is in their Rule that they are to refuse no kind of good work. We have been writing these very lines on the banks of the Mackenzie, where we have heard some veteran religious of the northern convents say, with all cheerfulness, as if it were the simplest thing in the world. "I should like very much to be sent there: to be there would mean to be doing missionary work indeed." And whenever the Bishop visits any of the Convents of the Grey Nuns in his Vicariate, he is always sure to be asked for news of the Eskimo Mission.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

How can there be such courage in weak women, those humble Sisters of Charity? Is there a fascination for them in continual self-sacrifice, such as seems to be beyond the capacity of human nature? What is it that enables them so to suffer and to do?

A reader of these pages, if a stranger to the Christian Faith, would be brought face to face with these questions, and therefore—as he would think—either with downright folly, or with some mystery hidden from his eyes. But for us there is no mystery in the folly of the Cross. We know where those hidden sources have their rise, which give birth to so much self-immolation. We know from what pierced Heart shoots forth the flame of apostolic zeal, and this we must never tire of telling, for the glory of God, and for the honour of the Catholic Church, the chief creator of heroic souls.

We must proclaim also how the Divine goodness, which has the whole world in charge, strikes a balance between this side and that, amid the variations which keep the world in being. The very privations, which are inevitable in the northern



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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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snows, are a positive help to length of life. The death of Sister Hedwige Dandurand was announced in the following terms, in a circular of March 1878: "The first victim of the Missions of the Far North.—For nearly twenty years, in faith, obedience, and the most unselfish zeal, many of our Sisters have been at work in the vast plains of Saskatchewan, and on the banks of the Great Lakes. Privations, sufferings, and sacrifices have been the lot of those courageous missionaries. Nevertheless, strange to say, though most of them were of delicate health, though they had no bread to eat, though they were often hungry after their insipid plate of fish, they continued to live and to work, year after year. It is only now that the first victim has fallen, in the person of this dear Sister, who has been laid to rest in the cemetery of Ile à la Crosse, among those Indians whom she looked upon as the chosen portion of her inheritance."

The proverb then is true, that it is not misery that kills.

From Lake Athabaska in 1879, one of the Grey Nuns wrote: "Though we have nothing but dried fish, our health is not suffering. On the contrary, we were never so well as we are at present. Truly is it said that what God takes away on one side, He gives on another."

Even so: poor diet God makes nutritious, and

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the cold dry climate He makes bracing and healthful. Many a one of the Grey Nuns, whom consumption would have carried off in her youth, if she had remained in reach of the doctors, and medicines, and comforts, in Montreal, was spared for a long and sufficiently healthy life of usefulness, in the rude Indian Missions of the North.

With health in Mackenzie, there is found also the flower of peace, a light and happy heart. It is not in those Northern convents, buried under the snow for more than half the year, that the traveller can see the ruffled brow of care. Indeed he will not discover elsewhere such high glee, and such hearty laughter. Let us hear what the Jubilarians of the present day said of themselves in 1867: "Winter began on October 1. Everything freezes. In the morning we find the water and the ink turned into stone. This very morning, in 78 degrees of frost, I had to put the ink over the fire, in order to continue my letter. However, I ought not to have said that everything freezes. An exception has to be made in favour of cheerfulness, and innocent mirth, such precious possessions, particularly in the Missions of the Northwest."

Then, again, it must be borne in mind how easily those good Nuns are contented. Chateaubriand, in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, said, "True happiness costs but little; the happiness which is

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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expensive is an inferior article." About the same date, that is in 1849, Father Taché, at Ile à la Crosse, writing even more wisely than Chateaubriand, said: "Hurrah for the North! I think that of all the countries in the world this is the one in which it is easiest to learn the lesson, that man wants but little here below to make him truly happy."

Louise of France, the Carmelite Nun, told her visitor, Gustavus of Sweden, that, in her poor cell, on her poor couch, she slept better than at Versailles. Something similar would, no doubt, be said by our Missionary Sisters, in reply to any expression of sympathy with their condition.

Nevertheless, let it not be supposed that the rough, rude deserts of the North have any advantages which would make a mortal willing to live there, if it were not his own, his native, land. Those who come in search of the rich furs of the north, return as quickly as possible to their own warm climes, and to civilized circles. They do not regret that the winters which enrich them are over and gone for ever. The happiness of the missionary heart is not the natural growth of the frozen soil, or the destructive tempest.

In a passage written by one of those whom we may call the recluses of the Providence Mission we are shown the real sources of their courage and their joyous self-sacrifice. She wrote: "What is it,

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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ORPHAN BOYS CUTTING WOOD SUPPLY.

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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after all, to have charge of forty children, when one thinks of the prosperous works of our Missions elsewhere? But, then, we reflect on the value of even one soul, and so we see reason to rejoice in such good as we are able to do in this poor country, where, without missionaries, those children would be brought up in paganism."

Reflection on the value of a soul, in other words, lively faith in the Divine Redeemer and His Precious Blood, and in the true worth of the little ones whom He set in the midst of His earthly kingdom as our models, ah! there, indeed, is the lever which moves even mountains in the Christian Church.

The eye of Faith is ever turned towards Heaven, the unfailing source of hope and joy. Listen:

"Our 30,000 fishes seem to be spoiling on account of the fine weather. Poor unpalatable fish! We must only force ourselves to eat it. In heaven will be the banquet of all delights."

So Sister St. Michael wrote in reference to the famine of 1883 at Lake Athabaska, when some mothers ate their children who died in the woods, and some children ate their mothers. Sometimes the Nuns, depending on what the orphans might leave, went supperless to bed. Sister St. Michael continues: "The other evening a child of six came to rap at our room door, saying, 'Sister, me not able to sleep: too hungry.' I am sure that in all the wide



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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world there can hardly be another country like this, where miseries of all kinds keep each other company. Surely it bears upon it all the marks of the Path to Paradise."

On their Path to Paradise, so plainly marked out in the Mackenzie country, the Missionary Sisters never failed to find in abundance the food which kept their souls alive and strong. Well they knew and loved the inexhaustible sources out of which spring up Faith, and Hope, and Charity, and zeal for God's glory.

In the foremost place was a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Their Foundress, Mother d'Youville, had been one of the first to propagate this devotion in Canada. She charged her disciples also to foster it both in their own communities, and wherever they were engaged in missionary work. Hence, the feasts of the Sacred Heart, and the devotional observance of the First Friday of each month, are in particular honour wherever these Sisters are established. Their first foundation in the Mackenzie Vicariate was the Sacred Heart Hospital. The Heart of Jesus, represented on the Cross which they wear, sets their own heart on fire with the spirit of self-sacrifice, and most closely unites their life with that of their Divine model, the victim of atoning Love. Consequently, Our Divine Lord has blessed their under-

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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takings, has consoled them in their trials, has imparted to them the gift of touching the most hardened sinners, and has written their own name on His Heart, from which it shall never be effaced.

The Grey Nuns have well understood also that with devotion to the Sacred Heart is joined devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. When the first Bishop of St. Albert, Mgr. Grandin, was pleading with Pope Pius IX. for permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament, even where there could be no "lamp of the sanctuary," he was not thinking only of the Missionary Priests, but also of the equally isolated Nuns, whose first residence he himself had built at Fort Providence.

"But," said the Pope, "it is only in times of persecution that it could be allowed to keep the Blessed Sacrament, with no light burning before it."

"Holy Father," said the poor Missionary Bishop, "it is true we are not persecuted; but we have to suffer so much, and we are so destitute of all things; we are often obliged, and we are already permitted, to say Mass with only one light; to be deprived of the presence of our Sacramental Lord would be a terrible privation."

The Pope was touched and yielded. He said, "My dear Bishop, I understand you: I understand your need of that consolation. Your life of priva-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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tion and sacrifice has all the merit of martyrdom, without its glory."

The Nuns of the Far North, in their poor and cold chapels, where for nearly fifty years there was no lighted sanctuary lamp, were consoled by the Eucharistic presence of Him, whom they faithfully guarded, and who was Himself their Guardian. Morning by morning they unite with the sacrifice of Calvary the unreserved offering of their own lives; and the Divine Presence in the Holy Communion brings into their souls strength enough to bear the burden of another day. Can there ever be more fervent or more fruitful Communions than those made in the midst of the Northern desolation, where there is nothing whatever to distract, where there is no other attraction, or heart's ease, except the presence and the love of our Divine Lord? We do not wonder at finding, on some intimate pages, the expression of the most ardent love and devotion for the Holy Eucharist entertained by those Missionary Sisters. Sister Galipeau, of Montreal, died at the Fort Providence Convent on June 27, 1893. Her Superior, writing to the Mother General, said: "She received the Last Sacraments on May 28, the last Saturday of the month of Mary. Seeing the Sisters weeping, she wept too. She was reminded that she ought only to be glad since she was going into the presence of her Heavenly

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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Father. She said, 'Yes, but to go to Heaven, I have to leave you. Ah! if we might all go together!' Her one desire was for Holy Communion. The state of her throat, growing worse and worse, threatened to make Communion impossible. A doctor, on his way to Klondike, was called in to see her. He saw that she had not long to live. He told her, and she was perfectly content. She only asked if his treatment could not enable her to receive Holy Communion. That was her one desire—to communicate, so as to be the better prepared to die a holy death. Her devout desire was gratified by the help of the doctor's care and remedies. It was only two hours after her last Holy Communion that she piously fell asleep in the Lord."

Along with her Divine Son, the Holy Mother, the Blessed Virgin, Mary Immaculate, watches over her children. All the way from the Pyrenees to Providence, she sent them her white and blue Lourdes statue, in circumstances that looked quite marvellous. The case containing it reached Ile à la Crosse just at the time of the Rising in 1885. The pagans among the Indians and Half-Breeds, sacking the Mission premises, broke the case open with one blow of a hatchet, which slightly gashed the face of the statue. The raiders were so frightened at seeing this "woman in a coffin" that they ran off

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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with all speed. A Catholic Indian brought back the statue to the Mission. In due course it reached its destination, and at the present day it smiles upon the devout clients of Our Lady in the Sacred Heart Hospital at Providence. That statue and a ciborium were the only objects saved at Ile à la Crosse Mission in 1885!\*

Among heavenly protectors, St. Joseph holds, naturally, a very high place. He is indeed the fatherly provider for all needs. With great confidence is he invoked in times of trouble. St. Joseph is no far-off personage, but the ever-present father of the home, in the Missions of the North. Everyone says quite familiarly, as if in his hearing, "St. Joseph has done that"; "St. Joseph has given us this"; "we must ask St. Joseph"; "let us make a novena to St. Joseph." In truth, the novenas to St. Joseph become so entangled, that only he himself can tell which is which. There are novenas for the fishing grounds, the hunting grounds, the garden, and the water supply. Mgr. Breynat has made St. Joseph the chief economer of his Vicariate,

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\*The news of the Rising reached the Nuns at Providence the following year. They noticed stains of blood on cases which the Indian porters were handling with evident repugnance, and asked an explanation. The Indians said, "Those come from Ile à la Crosse. There has been fighting there, and Nuns like you have been killed." For a long time, this was all that the Nuns heard, and they did not know it was an exaggeration.

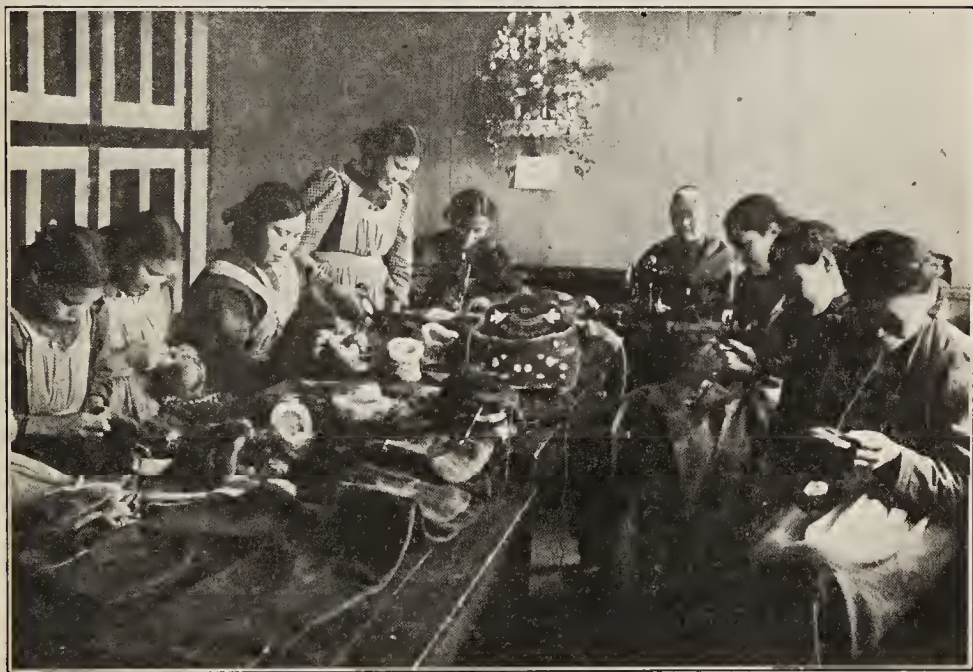


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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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if Father Lefebvre is the second. Thanks are sometimes offered to St. Joseph in circumstances which give witnesses their own long thoughts, although the word miracle is not used, out of respect for Church rules. Some there are who think that the



THE SEWING CLASS.

Fancy work on reindeer skins, porcupine quills, fish scales, etc. The Indian girls are very skilful in making articles of this kind, and give them willingly to their benefactors.

Foster Father, before now, has had compassion on a multitude, left with nothing to eat. Let us quote, without comment, a letter written from Lake Athabaska, on September 8, 1912.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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"Last year our potato crop was very poor. At first there was talk of putting the children on rations. In a fortnight the potatoes in the storehouse began to be so bad that the remaining good ones had to be picked out by hand. There was no use in trying to save them, we said. When they were all gone, we should have to do without them. But it is not for nothing that St. Joseph has charge of our stores. Young and old have had potatoes three times a day until now, and never were the potatoes so good at such a date. We all give the heartiest thanks to our good provider, St. Joseph."

In the winter of 1916-17, the hunters had not been able to kill even one moose. Consequently, by the beginning of March, there was very little fish left at St. Joseph's Mission, Fort Resolution. Yet the next fishing season was two months away. An Oblate Brother had nearly lost his life in making efforts previously unheard-of to fish under the ice. Yet he had caught nothing. The caribou (reindeer) had not come near Fort Resolution for several years, and, besides, it was now their season for returning from the neighbourhood of Great Slave Lake to the further north. What was to be done? There were 100 children to be fed, ten Nuns, and as many Oblates. And the thirty dogs could not be forgotten, though some of them might have to be sacrificed, if human beings were not to die.

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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One evening, Father Duport, O.M.I., Superior of the Mission, went to the children's refectory, where the poor little ones were trying to make a meal of a small portion of roasted fish. He put on a frown, and said, "Children, the famine is not the fault of the Brothers; they have done all that they possibly could; it is not the fault of your good Mothers here, the Nuns; they have made every sacrifice; it is you yourselves who are in fault." Some of them began to sob, thinking the Superior was scolding them for eating too much. But he said, "That is not what I mean. If I am displeased, it is because you do not pray well enough to St. Joseph." So, thereupon, the children all stood up, and promised to pray with all their heart and all their soul. The Reverend Mother was asked how many caribou would be required. She said it would be impossible to get through the long season before them with less than a hundred. All then knelt down, and immediately began a novena to St. Joseph for a hundred caribou.

Two days later, there was no more food left at St. Joseph's Mission. Father Duport said to the two hunters employed by the Mission: "Take the dogs and sledge, and go and try your luck." They shrugged their shoulders, saying it was quite useless, as there was nothing whatever to be had. "Go, I tell you," said Father Duport; "kill us a hundred caribou; St. Joseph owes them to us."

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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The two Indian hunters set out, though quite sure they would have to return empty-handed. They had gone only a two days' journey—a mere trifle in the Wild North—when, to their surprise, they saw an immense herd of caribou upon the frozen Lake, and saw to their greater surprise, that they were coming from the east. The hunters quickly recovered their wits, took up a good position, and began to shoot. Alphonse, a particularly good shot, sometimes brought down two or three animals with one bullet. When their ammunition was exhausted, the Indians counted their “bag.” They had killed 103 caribou. At that very time, the orphans and the Nuns were repeating their Novena prayers, and calling on St. Joseph to send them a hundred, “and not one less.”

Rev. Fr. Duport, to whom we owe these particulars, says in conclusion: “When you preach on St. Joseph and his powerful intercession, you may well mention our case, for I have had many reasons to convince me that this glorious Saint is our heavenly protector, and that it is he who provides for all our wants in this immense and icy wilderness.”

After Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, our Missionary Sisters place confidence also in their Venerated Foundress, Mother d'Youville, the thought of whom is a perpetual inspiration to them in all their

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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labours for the sake of the Gospel. They love to make a treasury of all the occasions of merit which are so plentiful in the Far North, and to unite these with all the prayers and sacrifices of all their convents, and to present all this accumulated wealth before the Throne of God, with a petition for the solemn glorification of their beloved Foundress. The Sisters of the North tell already of extraordinary graces attributed to her intercession, and likely to be humbly submitted to the judgment of the Church. They tell of the wonderful cure of Father Rapet in 1885, after he had spent thirty-three days in a hut, in very bad weather, in order to be near the Nuns who had left Ile à la Crosse during the Insurrection. They tell also of three fires suddenly extinguished at Lake Athabaska, and of other marvellous events. And they feel very happy under the special protection of such a Mother, whom they invoke with all confidence, in their private prayers.

What may be considered part of their filial devotion to Mother d'Youville is that passionate devotion which St. Paul called the folly of the Cross. We believe that there is not one of the Grey Nuns who would not be bitterly disappointed if, on reaching the Mackenzie Missions, she found that the sufferings of the early days were all past and gone. One young Nun, among the first who were sent to Great Slave Lake, thus expressed her feel-



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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ings: "Evidently it is our Divine Lord's wish that all our Missions should have the Cross in their foundation, so that we may be the true children of Mother d'Youville. Here and now, we have the honour of being able to imitate her in the privations of our present life, and to prove to our Heavenly Spouse that it is our happiness to fulfill the promises which we made Him on the day of our religious profession."

In the Annals of the Mother House at Montreal we find an entry which ought to find its place here:—"When it became known that Sister Pigeon was to go to the North, her mother was greatly distressed. Following only the impulses of a mother's heart, Madame Pigeon begged and prayed that she might be spared this sacrifice. She represented in particular that her daughter had never been able to eat fish, and that she would die, if sent where there was no other food. Our Reverend Mother General thought it right to yield. Without telling Sister Pigeon, she brought Sister Métivier from Lawrence, to take her place. But when Sister Pigeon heard what had happened, and saw another Sister ready to make the sacrifice in her stead, she, in her turn, was inconsolable. She hastened to beseech the Mother General not to change the original appointment. It was true, she said, that she had not eaten fish, but that was because other food

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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was to be had. Where there would be nothing but fish, of course she would have to eat it. Then, getting permission to send for her mother, she represented to her that God Almighty was asking them both for a sacrifice, which they had no right to refuse. At last, the loving mother agreed to let her daughter go, with her blessing. But there was a new difficulty. Sister Métivier said she had her obedience for the North, and she wanted to go. Some of the witnesses of the little debate between these two courageous souls, vying with each other in generosity, were moved even to tears. However, Sister Pigeon, being on the first list, was allowed to have her way."

This victory of daughter and mother, in a sublime contest between natural love and the love of the Cross, had its counter-part in the victory for self-sacrifice gained in a contest between a fervent young Nun and her Mother Superior. This Superior, afterwards to be the Mother General of the Grey Nuns, considered a certain Sister lately professed to be absolutely necessary in the house where they both were. But one day the Mother General of the time came to the Community to ask for a "volunteer" for the Far North. The first to raise her hand was our young Sister, and therefore she was chosen. But the Local Superior had many objections to make, and would not yield until the

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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young Nun said at last: "Mother, I have made this sacrifice, and the sacrifice of my life, for the conversion of a member of my family." She went, after heart-rending farewells, for her relations and friends were very numerous. She escaped death by a sort of miracle on one of the north bound barges. The conversion for which she longed was granted, and she takes it as sufficient reward for the heroism with which she remains at her post for the last twenty years.

After hearing of such devotedness and self-denial, we need not be surprised to find that the only real trials of those Grey Nuns, the only trials which leave them inconsolable, are the limits imposed upon their endeavours to assist their neighbour. Mother Charlebois, after a visit to the Convents in the North, wrote: "I can understand now how painful it is for those dear Sisters to be forced to refuse poor orphans, little girls abandoned by their kin, and poor neglected old women. The sacrifices and continual privations of the Sisters are nothing, compared with this powerlessness to do more good. I share their regret and pain, whilst I pray God to inspire some generous souls to come to their assistance."

There is another point on which we must dwell a little here. The royal Psalmist proclaims how

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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good and how pleasant it is for those who form one family, and who dwell together in unity. The Sisters of Charity are to each other sisters indeed, and cherish each other with sisterly affection, all rejoicing to be in the arms of the same Heavenly Mother, Mary Immaculate, all kneeling side by side, at the foot of the same Tabernacle, in the land of exile, far from any earthly home. And their domestic charity, circulating through all the veins of each far-flung community, returns also to the fountain-head and heart; thoughts, desires, and aspirations are always centered in the dear Mother House of the whole Order.

It has been our privilege to read, and to hear, and to observe, much that concerns the Grey Nuns of Montreal. The result has been our strong conviction that this Religious Institute is God's own handiwork, and that neither death, nor persecution, nor lapse of time, nor loss, shall ever prevail against it. And one great motive of this conviction is the holy charity which joins all the members together, the love of the daughters for their mother, their attachment to that cradle of their religious life from which their mission work separates them. Go into the communities of the Far North, and you will find yourself in the atmosphere of the Mother House. The thought of the Mother General, and her Assistants, and of each one's fellow-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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novices, and of the seniors who have borne the burden of the day—such thought is never long absent. All that is told the visitor, and all that he is asked, will show him that the Mother House really lives in the Far North also. It comes and goes, and talks and smiles, writes letters joyfully received, and dictates those that are sent. It is to the Mother House that we owe whatever history is extant of the various foundations in the great Northwest. Here is a line written from the Red River: "I do not know how I was able to be so courageous that morning of the 24th, when we parted. My only consolation, so far away, is to be still united in heart with all our Sisters, and to have a share in their good works."

According as they go further west, and further north, the Missionary Sisters gather in spirit more closely around those who remain "at home." Listen to some of the messages which they sent to that home, in 1867.

"Sunday, June 30. Dearest Mother,—On Sunday especially we think of the Mother House. We have tents with us. If we could only camp out some evening near you, and join you at recreation! Even to think of it does one good. What a lot of things there would be to tell, after so long a separation! But never again, in this world, shall we have that happiness. Still, there is heaven!"



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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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“July 8. It is the feast day of our dear Sister Assistant. After a fervent prayer for our beloved Mother of the far-off Missions, we kept our feast day quite joyously. . . . Good-bye, dear Reverend Mother, dear Sister Assistant, and dear Sisters all. We wish you a happy holiday, and we beg of you a little prayer, at the feet of our Mother Foundress, for your Missionary Sisters, who are every day going further and further away from those they love so much.”

“July 28. The immense and solitary prairies invite us to reflection. In spirit we are in Montreal, united with our beloved Sisters, for whom this is the day of the monthly retreat.”

“August 21. The feast day of our beloved Mother General. Alas, here to-day we have no Mass, no Communion! We can only bear in mind what joyful feasts and happy gatherings there are in Montreal and St. Boniface, to wish our well-beloved Mother a happy feast, and many happy returns of the day. We unite in spirit with all the dear Sisters who have the happiness to live near you, dearest Mother, and also with those other Sisters who, like ourselves, are deprived of this pleasure, and, along with them all, we ask the angels to carry on their azure wings, to the feet of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, the prayers and good wishes which we put up to heaven on your behalf. Very

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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fervent were our prayers on this beautiful feast. We felt ourselves to be near you, and it was very sweet to us to think, whilst so far away, that we shall one day keep your feast in the true homeland. There, there will be no Northwest, and no separation; we shall be all together, close to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the very rendezvous which you have given us, dearest Mother, by sending us the beautiful little statue of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart."

Such communications will enable us to understand what a privation it is for dwellers amid the Northern snows to be able only at rare intervals to receive or to send a letter. By the Grey Nuns this privation is known as *fasting from letters*. To such fasting one can never get accustomed. If curiosity alone were hurt, mortification might make all well again. But affection feels the deeper wound. Hence, at certain periods of the year, the horizon of the lake is eagerly scanned for the possible appearance of some one bearing messages from afar.

Here is a passage, which is a wail of woe: "No letter from the Mother House, nor from anyone in Montreal! Our dear Sister Superior (Sister Lavoie) is only an apprentice in fasting from letters. She finds it a very heavy penance. It is indeed the great hardship of the North, to which no length of time can make us grow indifferent."

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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And here is a letter of September, 1907, in which the Sister Superior at Providence wafts a sigh from near the Pole to Eastern Canada: "It appears that God wishes to add to our privations. We used to have three posts in the year. Now there is a new arrangement, by which we are to have one post in the winter, taking no letters back, and another in July, when navigation is open. So, then, we can write only once a year, and must wait till the following year for an answer. We all feel this privation very much, and I most of all, because I have so often to ask advice on various subjects. The change has been made by the Chief Factor, who is leaving Simpson, to reside at Fort Smith. It appears progress is not intended for this part of the world. I pray Our Lord to teach me how to wait with patience."

But the circular, which quotes this letter, adds: "Whilst our dear Sisters were making these lamentations, the Right Reverend Bishop, Mgr. Breynat, was in Ottawa, pleading the cause of the Northern Missions. He was very courteously received by the Ministers and the Postmaster-General, and was promised three winter posts for Fort Resolution, and two for the Arctic Stations. How thankful we are for this relief!"

If letters from high latitudes were rare, at all events they were long. They now form volumes in

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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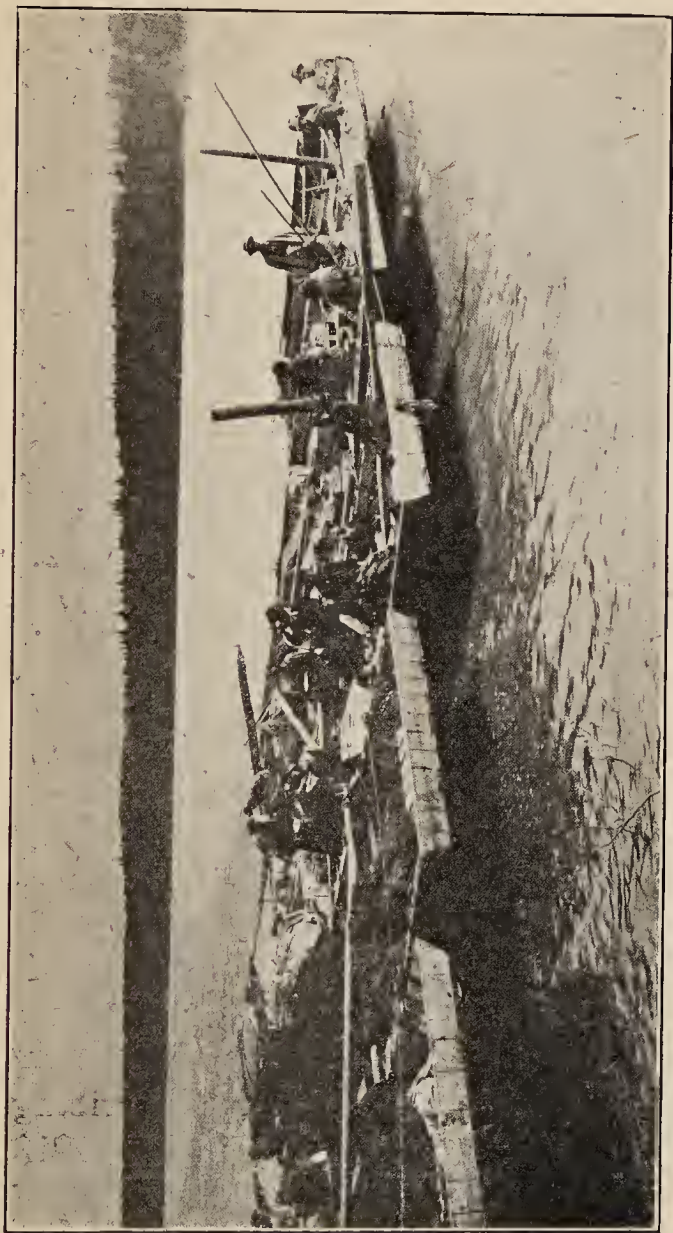
prose and in verse. Out of the abundance of the heart, the pen spoke. In a letter of 1880, from Fort Providence, were enclosed some pansies (pensées), grown there, and reaching Montreal still fresh in perfume and colour. With them was a beautiful little poem in French, dedicating these "thoughts," *les fleurs du souvenir*, to the Mother General (Rev. Mother Deschamps). No doubt a letter in English would have enclosed a forget-me-not, for the sake of the same happy play upon words.

The great feasts, the greatest of all feasts, in the convents far away, are the visits of the Superiors. After them, there can remain only the blessed vision of peace! The Superior's coming is for years expected and prepared for. For years it remains a green spot in the soul. The sorrow of parting gives a nun the measure of the happiness she has felt in the arms of a Mother who is loving and loved, sympathizing, and revered. To such a Superior someone wrote: "Mother dear, I cannot tell you how we feel since you left us. We are orphans. The first time we met together on the verandah, we had not a word to say. We kept looking at the hill opposite, until one of the young Sisters pointed and said, 'There's where she passed,' and we all burst out crying. Mother, did not that

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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"SCOWS" AT ANCHOR ON THE ATHABASKA RIVER.  
The old barges were much smaller and had the form of barks.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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torrent of tears overtake you? Surely, Madame Swetchine was right in saying that our passing gleams of joy make the heart sink into deeper night. For a fortnight you were with us, loving and consoling, and petting us. And then you disappeared. . . . The moment calls for your favourite hymn, *J'attends le ciel*: Yes, heaven is the prize. Adieu, beloved Mother, and hearty thanks for your visit, which has renewed our fervour, and has made everyone content, and especially content with you, good Mother."

The Convent at La Providence received the first visit of the Mother General only in 1912. Reverend Mother Piché landed there on July 1, that year. There was a triple feast: the golden jubilee of the Oblate Mission of Notre Dame de la Providence, and the silver jubilee in the priesthood of the devoted Superior, Father Giroux, coincided with the first visit of the Mother General. We have in this chapter been considering the sources of that religious devotedness by which we are so edified. And we must, in another chapter, examine the results or fruits of those sacred sources or springs. We cannot better close the one chapter, and open up the other, than by transcribing here the hasty notes that were written in July, 1912, concerning a homely, yet quite religious, celebration.

"All day some of us were on the watch. At

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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last, some of the children saw the smoke appearing round the Point, and shouted, "The Steamboat." At once the outdoor bell was rung to call the children from the woods. In less than half an hour everyone is at the water side. The weather is splendid. A light breeze makes the flags ripple and swell. The children are all ranged in order, carrying coloured streamers. The Sisters wave white handkerchiefs to the *Sainte Marie*, which is now in view. With a glass we can see two Nuns among the passengers. Our good Mother, so loved, and so longed for, is there. All hearts are beating. The steamer passes quite close to us, and we accompany it to the landing stage, where all form a semi-circle. Now we see on board the Bishop, Father Lefebvre, and four Grey Nuns. The children sing a few words of welcome, three times repeated, and wave their little flags. We hasten on board to receive the Bishop's blessing, and the embrace of our good Mother, who says 'How far away you are.'\* With

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\*This sense of the immensity and the isolation of the great North land, so wild and so lone, is common to all travellers, although it is only in the summertime that they are able to make acquaintance therewith. In 1917, a Protestant gentleman, an explorer, who landed at Lake Athabaska from the same boat as the Mother General of the Grey Nuns, said to one of the Oblate Fathers: "I nearly broke down when I saw your Nuns run to meet the Reverend Mother. They seemed to me like persons a long time marooned on a desert island, and overjoyed to see at last a human face."

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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her we have the pleasure of finding Sister St. Angela, Sister MacQuillan, and Sister MacQuirk. Mgr. Breynat and the Mother General land, and pass along the ranks. The Mother General, 'doing at Rome as Rome does,' gives her hand to all the Indians, who are present in great numbers this summer.

A procession is formed, the children leading the way to the Church. There a *Laudate* is sung by the children, whilst all hearts expand in adoration and thanksgiving. At a signal, the procession is reformed. We pass before the Bishop's House, under a triumphal arch. The Bishop and the Reverend Fathers are there. The children fall into two lines in front of the Convent, and once more salute the Mother General and her companions. After a little while in the community room, Mother General enters the reception hall, where she sees the figures 50 and 25 on the children's breasts and decorating the room. The children were arranged in eight groups, representing the eight different Missions from which they have come to us. They sang very joyously a little hymn and chorus, specially written for the occasion, and explaining the figures of golden and silver jubilee, the 50 and the 25.

Next comes a little play or dialogue, as follows:—

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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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*Five little boys, and five little girls, arrive, rather out of breath.*

Joseph.—Here we are at last.

Marie.—Yes, but very tired.

Paul.—Ah, We have had a long way to come!

Julienne.—Let us ask these young ladies what is up; they are likely to know what is going on here.

Peter.—It all looks very strange, certainly.

Joseph.—What is the meaning of this Cross, those figures, flowers and decorations?

Delphine.—Dear friends, this is indeed a great day here, Vital, the biggest boy, knows all about it, and he will tell you if you wish.

Vital.—Yes, and I will tell you with all the more pleasure because I have to tell of kindness received, and because gratitude is what ought to be deeply imprinted in all our hearts. There are three things that bring us here to-day, three great feasts. And each of them is a reason why we should thank God for all His mercies to our country. I will tell you the meaning of those shining figures of 50. Those golden figures mean golden jubilee. Fifty years ago, the Missionaries, having at their head the Great Priest, as the patriarch, Beaulieu, used to say, came here and planted the Cross. They built the first Church, and some huts. Those good Missionaries were Mgr. Gràndin, and Fathers Gascon and Petitot. Since their coming, the Mission has prospered, and we see here to-day children from all the Forts—from Fort Rae, Fort Nelson, and even from the Arctic Red River. Here we are educated, here we are taught to know and love God. And all this we owe to the Oblate Fathers, who for fifty years have been busy in the hard work which we sometimes impose upon them.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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All.—God bless our Bishop! God bless the Oblate Fathers!

Anna.—Now I will tell you the meaning of our second festival here to-day. You may see on the walls of our Convent some very honoured names, reminders of memorable days, showing that great persons have visited us, though we are on the very edge of the world. But never before to-day have we seen the beloved Mother of our dear teachers. Nevertheless, we knew her name very well, and we were full of joy when the news of her visit found its way over our rapids, and through our woods. You all understand what reason we have for our joy.

Jules.—Now it is my turn to speak, and I want to tell you about that silver number 25. It means silver jubilee. It means that 25 years ago our good Father Superior received that Sacrament which gave him the power to bring Jesus from heaven upon the altar, and to give us the Holy Communion, which most of us receive every day since the great privilege was granted us by our Holy Father, Pope Pius X. You see we have blessings upon blessings. Never can we repay what we owe to the devoted Father Superior. All that we can do in return, is to live good lives, not only here, but when we return into the woods, among our own people.

Marie.—But some one must explain to us about that Cross and those flowers.

Léonie.—I know. Wherever the Missionary goes, he plants a Cross. That is what keeps him brave. As for the flowers, our Reverend Fathers are the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. So the Lily, her emblem, may stand for them, and the Marguerite, or Daisy, may remind us of the Nuns, our teachers, whose first Mother was called



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## THE SOURCES OF DEVOTEDNESS

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Marguerite. The Daisy is also the flower of the Sacred Heart, and this Convent is the Sacred Heart Hospital.

Anna.—Before we separate, let us sing once more our joyful song of welcome.

ALL SING.\*

July 14. High Mass of thanksgiving sung by the Father Superior. He explains to the people that the Holy Sacrifice is offered in thanksgiving to God for a great blessing to the Mission, namely, the visit of this good Mother General, who, in spite of delicate health, has undertaken all the fatigues of so long a journey, in order to encourage her spiritual children who labour with such self-abnegation in this place. She was to have gone to Rome, and to have seen our Holy Father the Pope, but she gave up that voyage in order to come to Mackenzie.

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\*The reader will have noticed that the Nuns, who must have had something to do with this little dialogue, place the Oblates in bold relief, remaining themselves in the background. They have always been teaching the lesson of gratitude to others, and they have often had naive and touching proofs of the gratitude entertained in their own regard. On October 18, 1889, the feast day of the Sister Superior at Ile à la Crosse, Baptist, a young Indian working at the Mission, called to pay her his respects, and she asked him to pray for her. He said he would, and straightway went to ask the Oblate Fathers for a rosary.

"Have you lost the one I gave you the other day?" he was asked.

"No," he said, "but much I love the Sister Superior, and I want to pray for her on both sides of the boat."

Next day, at mass, he was seen with two rosaries: he was rowing with both hands!

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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July 17. Our Right Rev. Bishop announces that there will be Mass at midnight. We make use of the word, but we have no night in this country, at this season. The grown-up girls make a presentation to the Mother General of a beautiful pair of moccasins. They had already given her some other articles worked by themselves, and in particular a pair of white gloves for Dr. Masson, with a letter written by Marie-Rose, to thank him for allowing Mother to come, and for telling her that the journey would only do her good.

We spend the remaining time with our good Mother, feeling very much how quickly it is passing. At twelve o'clock the Bishop says Mass, and for Mother General's intentions. All the children are present, and sing with unusual spirit. After Mass, we go to the refectory: we are at a last supper. So quickly end all earthly joys! At 3.30 a.m., the partings. In silence and in sorrow, we accompany Mother General to the Boat. At 4, the *Sainte Marie* moves off, taking our beloved Mother away."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE FRUITS

*"By their fruits you shall know them."*

THE reader who has accompanied us so far has, no doubt, already said that in half a century such devoted Nuns must have formed a generation of civilized and Christian folk in the fastnesses of the North. Nevertheless, it is worth while to consider some details. In a garden of the Lord, it is pleasant and profitable to study with care those fruits which are all for the glory of God, and to which He alone has given life and increase.

The coming of the Sisters of Charity made a profound impression on the Indians.

Its first good effect was the revolution in their ideas concerning women. The pagan women thought of themselves as nothing but born thralls, to be sometimes sold or lent or exchanged, and always despised. The dignity and the holiness of the "Daughters of Prayer" was a permanent lesson for them, and still more for the Red Men, who had been accustomed to treat wife and daughter, mother and grandmother, with contempt and cruelty. In those Religious they seemed to see realized what

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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had been taught them about the Blessed Virgin Mary, the most perfect of all creatures, on earth or in heaven.

The devotedness of the Nuns to the needy and the sick made also a deep impression. Something has already been said on that subject, in connection with the Sacred Heart Hospital. Of the Holy Angels' Convent at Lake Athabaska, one of the Sisters wrote in 1914: "We have here a dispensary open at all hours of the day, and we visit the sick regularly. Everybody applies to the Sisters, whether in slight or in serious illness. In fact, Sister Laverty is not only nurse, but physician, surgeon, and dentist. The principal persons of the place, and some outsiders, clubbed together last year, and bought her a dentist's chair!"

The good work of charity on behalf of the sick has done a great deal in the Northwest to banish any prejudice. A Government official said not long ago: "I feel most grateful to the Grey Nuns of Mackenzie. On my arrival at Fort Resolution, I called on them, because my eyes were giving me great trouble, and the doctor at Edmonton had done me no good in return for his fee. The Sister, not asking my religion, and refusing to take any fee, gave me a remedy which cured me. I feel most grateful, and I shall be glad of any opportunity to oblige those good Nuns. I can assure you that the

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## THE FRUITS

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existence of such as they are is no slight argument in favour of the truth of your religion."

Some of the patients tended by the Sisters have been healed in soul as well as body. A barrister, going along with many miners to the Klondike goldfields, was laid up with gout at Fort Simpson. At great expense, he got himself carried to the Sacred Heart Hospital at Fort Providence. There the Nuns took care of him all the winter. He did not leave before being reconciled with God, after having neglected his religious duties for twenty years. He went on to the Klondike, where he died a good death the following year.

Respect and confidence are shown the Grey Nuns by all manner of persons—Indians and Europeans, Protestants and Catholics, travellers and the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. No sooner do they appear on the steamers, or in any public place, than they are surrounded with all manner of respectful attentions.

But it was first of all for the children that the Missionary Sisters settled in the Far North. Of the children, therefore, we must now speak. Those little Indians found in the Sister of Charity more than a mother's love. They never saw her disgusted by vermin, rudeness, fickleness or ingratitude. Their misery and ignorance she treated with



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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all the tenderness of supernatural affection. Into their mind, and will, and heart, she endeavoured to instil something of the Christian spirit.

It was no easy task. There was no precedent to follow. The advance had to be made through a tangled and thorny wood, and no one had blazed the trail. The Sister of Charity was her own



A LESSON IN CHARITY.

pioneer. Method of education—for the children of the woods—there was none. The Sister of Charity invented her own system, and its success is her praise. Well she knew that it would be not merely useless, but mischievous, to try to give a taste for the town life of the 'Palefaces' to those who are destined to go back to the wigwam, to travel on snow shoes, and to use no other implement than the

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## THE FRUITS

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fishing net and the gun. She knew and judged wisely. The Indian hunters and fishermen of to-day, old pupils of Providence, Resolution, and Athabaska, "do honour to the Mission," as the common saying is in the North. They lead good Christian lives. They were taught in the Convent school the vanity of pretence, and the dignity of labour; they learned there that sorrow or pain as well as joy, may be offered to God on high, that the follower of Christ carries a Cross; and that what is of little account in itself may be precious as helping to sanctify our soul. Of old, the Indian lived his hard life, as a mere child of Nature. To-day, his life is just as hard—perhaps harder, for his constitution is less robust, and his hunting-grounds less well-stocked—but he lives his life under supernatural influences, as one who has been made a sharer in the Gospel of God's grace. The Sister of Charity taught him the meaning of that Gospel day by day, and detail by detail. She taught him how the little and the poor might be the dearest friends of the poor Child of Bethlehem. Her teachings he now repeats in his own language to those who had not heard them before. He uses his natural eloquence in spreading the knowledge of the Good Word. And, after his Christian life, when he lies down in his wigwam preparing to go "beyond the sky," he dies a Christian death, recall-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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ing the Nun's holy lessons for the hallowing of his last breath. Yes, the Red Indian has been transformed. And his transformation—the glory of the Christian religion—has been brought about by the patient perseverance of the Grey Nun and the Priest.

It is the religious teacher, especially, who has the consolation of seeing this transformation proceeding day by day, just as one may watch the growth of a plant in a fertile soil and clime. In those fresh and primitive natures, everything is remarkably interesting. The Indian's senses are impressionable and keen, to a degree far surpassing the keenest senses amongst white men. His eye carries to a distance which leaves us surprised, and his ear catches the slightest sound. He takes in, at a glance, the appearance of a stranger, or an unfamiliar scene. He has a musical ear and voice, and he loves singing. The children's choirs at Lake Athabaska and Providence are hardly inferior to the best boys' choirs anywhere. The Indian's keen faculties, and his sense of locality, make him very quick in learning languages. Little fellows of seven years old are often able to talk French and English after only a few months in the Convent, although coming from places where they had never heard a word of either language.

The question has been asked whether the intel-

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## THE FRUITS

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lect, which is first fed by the senses, is also keener among Indians than among white people. It would seem that it is not. The Indian appears to be less capable of abstraction and generalization than a member of the white race; what is concrete, real, actual, is what he seizes triumphantly; his speech, which has an abundance of phrases for describing the least details of any object once seen, has no abstract expressions. Nevertheless, we have read, in English and in French, summaries of a not too simple discourse, written, without assistance, by pupils of Athabaska and Mackenzie Convents, and leaving hardly any room for correction as regarded plan, developments, wording and spelling.

The Convent schools of the North have been visited by several Government Inspectors, not Catholics. The first arrived, without notice, at Lake Athabaska in 1908. The account of his visit, written at the time, may be of interest.

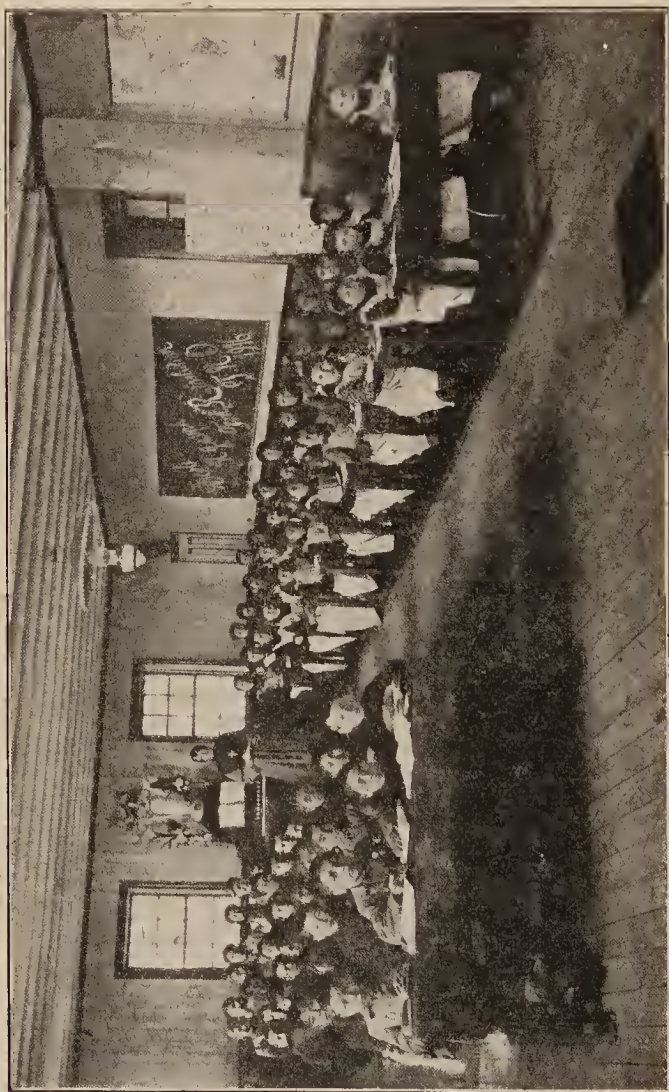
"We have had a surprise visit from the Government Inspector of Schools, Mr. Macrae, who was accompanied by the Bishop, Mgr. Grouard, and Mr. Harris, the Chief Factor at Fond du Lac. Everybody was very much excited, but the Inspector was very kind. He took a great many notes about everything. He asked very few questions himself, but requested one of the teachers to give her class as usual. The examination lasted



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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THE STUDY HALL AT ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL, FORT RESOLUTION,  
GREAT SLAVE LAKE.



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## THE FRUITS

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from one o'clock till five, without any interruption. When all was over, the Bishop expressed the hope that the Inspector would make allowance for all shortcomings, reminding him that those children, before coming to the Convent, knew nothing of schooling, and had never heard a word of either French or English. The Inspector replied that he quite understood, but that he would object to the Bishop's use of the word shortcomings. 'I assure you,' he said, 'there will be no such word in my report. I am greatly pleased with all that I have seen and heard. Indeed, I do not know how the Sisters have been able to bring about such good results. My report will give a great surprise to everyone, as the examination has been a great surprise to myself.'

"Mr. Macrae, before leaving, told us that he would be passing through again in a few days. So we prepared a little *séance*, at which, along with Mr. Macrae and his travelling companions, there were present also Dr. Edwards, five Police Officers, and several of the trading officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. We had a little lamp burning before the Blessed Sacrament, as a petition for God's blessing on our pupils. Those young Indians really got through their parts wonderfully well; so Mr. Macrae assured us several times. He said that in his twenty years as Indian Agent or School In-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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spector he had witnessed no such successful exhibition, such creditable school work. He was particularly struck by the ease with which the children spoke English, knowing that they are more familiar with French. He said in a speech to the school that he did not know they would have such a reception for him; that he thanked them all very much; and that he would surprise the gentlemen at Ottawa, when he showed them the programmes of the school, and told them what a prosperous establishment existed at Lake Athabaska."

A few months later, Mr. Macrae wrote from Ottawa to the Convent: "Your Institution is an oasis in the Northern desert. It is the creation of your courage, self-abnegation, many virtues, and much hard work, and in circumstances of great difficulty. Your wonderful success is beyond all praise."

We must not forget to mention that in 1883 the Protestant Chief Trader at Fort Vermilion, on the Peace River, journeyed 300 miles by canoe, to leave his children for their education at the Lake Athabaska Convent.

One of the latest testimonials to the good work done by the Convents is the following entry in the Visitors' Book in the Providence Convent. The writer is the Hon. Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior in the Dominion Government:—

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## THE FRUITS

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"A noted Mission doing good work. The faith and enterprise of its founders are justified by the work of their successors, which is a credit to Canada and Christianity.

June 26, 1910.

(Signed) FRANK OLIVER.

Notwithstanding what we have said about the ordinary life of even the educated Indian, it must be mentioned that there are some pupils of the Grey Nuns who now occupy posts formerly reserved for Europeans or Half-Breeds, *e.g.*, as traders, travellers, interpreters, etc. There is one pupil in a House of Studies, preparing for the priesthood, and there are others who hope to follow in his steps.

In order to continue, in some sort, the good work of the school, when the school days are over, the Mackenzie Nuns make use of the press. Since 1910, a little lithographed paper appears twice a year at Providence. It is sent out by each of the two posts, the winter and the summer. It is called *The Friendly Voice*. This little publication is most interesting. It contains all the news of the half-year, with reflections grave and gay, jovial and religious. It is sent to all the old pupils. If one of them is reported as not "doing honour to the

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Mission," no "Friendly Voice" reaches him, but he is recommended to the prayers of those who remain faithful. As a rule, this gentle hint suffices to make the erring one ashamed of himself, and anxious to be restored to favour.

It may be worth while to copy here some of the newsy paragraphs of the Providence paper.

"The 29 little boys attend well to their lessons, and the 36 girls are not surpassed by anyone in learning and good conduct. The two bigger girls try to provide for everyone, and to please even little Marie-Rose, not yet two years old, who is not always in good humour when called in the morning."

"At Mass the Bishop was greatly pleased to hear a very small voice singing, *O res mirabilis! manducat Dominum pauper*. It was Marie-Rose, now three years old. Wonderful indeed, for she understands about Holy Communion.

"Everybody is hard at work, learning English. They say that Sister Marie-Anne now dreams in English only.

"Fort Simpson folk, having good taste, like to live at Fort Providence. That explains why Céline has married Joseph. These two good old pupils have our best wishes and prayers for their happiness.

"On All Saints' Day, Mr. G. was received into the Church.

"Dear Little Barnaby, the best of children, left us, after a short illness, to go to Jesus whom he loved very much.

"Poor little Noelia, who was always so lively and gay! Her father was delighted when he saw her last summer. But she began to fail, and fade like a flower. She died in

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## THE FRUITS

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the arms of her aunt, Sister Noelia, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The Blessed Virgin took her where she can smile and play joyfully, more than ever now.

"God is good to us in our needs. Two silver foxes have been taken in Brother Oliviers's traps.

"December 23, 1914. Anniversary of the Venerable Mother d'Youville, who intoned the *Te Deum* after seeing



THE LEAGUE OF THE SACRED HEART, FORT RESOLUTION.

her Hospital burned to the ground. This morning, we and the orphans, during a Mass of Thanksgiving, sang our *Magnificat* in gratitude to God for showing us the beginnings of a fire, which, even a little later, might have been fatal.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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"Christmas Midnight Mass, so beautiful, for our poor country. The altar, with its angels, and lights, and hangings, and garlands, looked lovely, and lifted one's thoughts to heaven. The singing seemed to rival that of the angelic 'Glory to God'. And each one was supremely happy, receiving our Divine Lord in the Holy Communion.

"The Father Superior tells us the following little story. For three weeks, in an epidemic fever, little Anastasia hovered between life and death. She received Holy Viaticum. She was well watched night and day. The nursing of the good Nuns, and the prayers of all, especially of the child's grandmother—who neither ate nor slept, but said rosaries continually—snatched Anastasia from death. When she seemed out of danger, though still weak, I thought I must tell her the truth myself.

'So, little Anastasia, you are well again, thank God,' I said.

'Yes, Father,' said she, smiling, 'and I want to play with the other children.'

'You have been very ill, my dear child, but God has spared you to us. Do you remember that some of the others were sick too?

'Oh, I remember. Many were sick: my Sister Teresa, Marca, Jane, Zénaïde, and Anna.

'Well, some of your companions, whom you loved very much, are suffering no longer: they are gone to Jesus.'

'Where is Teresa?'

'Teresa is not suffering any longer; she is very happy.'

'I want her to come and see me, then, at once.'

'She does see you being near Jesus, where her suffering is at an end.'

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## THE FRUITS

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‘Did Jesus then come for my sister’? little Anastasia asked.

I said: ‘My dear child, on the eighth of this month, the day I gave you the Last Sacraments, your sister went to Jesus, to beg Him to leave you to console your good father and mother for her death.’

‘Oh, my sister is dead,’ said poor little Anastasia, bursting into a pitiful passion of tears.

I said: ‘I understand, you cannot help crying. But remember how happy Teresa is, near our blessed Lord, who will hear her prayers for you, and for your parents. She will watch over you until you meet and embrace each other in the heavenly country.’”

There is another little magazine, *St. Joseph's Messenger*, published at St. Joseph's Hospice, Fort Resolution, Great Slave Lake, which is by no means inferior in worth to the elder publication. Their use of the printed word shows how enlightened and efficient is the zeal of the Grey Nuns.

It is chiefly with a view to the religious formation of the intelligence and heart of the young Indian, that those Sisters devote themselves to all that is included in the one word education—the various branches of secular knowledge, preparation for public examinations, and the “continuation” work through their little magazines. Most consoling have been the secular and religious fruit of their patient and persevering labours. It is evi-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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CHILDREN OF MARY, FORT RESOLUTION.

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## THE FRUITS

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dent that the Grey Nuns have had the gift of a special vocation for the work in which they have been engaged so successfully.

Numberless have been the busy arts employed for the one good end. But they have all consisted in a wise adaptation, to persons and places, of the ordinary means of grace provided by our holy religion.

The first source of spiritual life brought home to the Indian was the Holy Eucharist. With what fervour the children of the woods responded to the desire of Our Lord and His Church may be learned from the religious demonstrations which took place in the most distant Convent of the Canadian Dominion, on the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress at Montreal. *The Friendly Voice* told something of the preparations made for the final procession, saying, "We desired, and we had, a triumphal procession in honour of our Eucharistic Lord, in union with the religious festivities at Montreal. The Nuns were the organizers. Never was there such a procession at Providence before. I wish you had been here to see the 300 spruce-trees decorating the path over which the Blessed Sacrament was carried, the beautiful canopy, the three fine banners, the splendid Altar of Repose, guarded by six little boys dressed as angels, and all the little girls in the procession in white, and carrying crowns!"

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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It was about this time that Pope Pius X. decreed that Holy Communion should be given very frequently, and even daily, to all who understood its meaning, and were rightly disposed. The Nuns explained accurately matters to their pupils, leaving them a free choice. The result was that frequent Communion became general among them, and daily Communion not uncommon. We have seen some of these Indian children receiving Holy Communion, and have been edified and delighted by their manifest faith and devotion. The sacred fruits of such faith and devotion are best known to the Priests and Nuns who watch the spiritual growth of those youthful souls. We have seen the considered opinion of Father Le Doussal, the venerable Chaplain of Holy Angels' Convent, who wrote: "Contrary to what was feared by some, the surprising Papal Decree has created enthusiastic love of the Holy Eucharist. And, as a practical measure, it has done immense good, triumphing over habits which seemed to require a miracle for their cure. Through frequent Communion our children have advanced very much in innocence and love of God. It is evident that this return to the primitive discipline of the Church has been of Divine inspiration."

We know that some of those good Convent children have come to feel a hunger and thirst after



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## THE FRUITS

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Holy Communion, and that nothing would give them so much pain as to be forbidden to approach the altar rails.

After Holy Communion, a potent factor in producing the happy results, the spiritual fruits, of the religious education given by the Nuns, is devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The Missionary Sisters bring their pupils to Jesus by the hands of Mary. The Immaculate Mother becomes the guardian of their purity and their faith. The Nuns have established societies of the Children of Mary, affiliated to the Archconfraternity in Rome, and having all the advantages of its rules and privileges. The enrolled Children of Mary always wear the blue ribbon and medal, the outward sign of their dedication to our Lady.

On December 8, 1915, the statue of the Immaculate Conception at Lake Athabaska was solemnly crowned by the Children of Mary, keeping high festival that day. A very beautiful scene also was the presentation of crowns to Our Lady by the little Indian girls, all in white arrayed, at the close of the retreat preached in 1916 for the Convent inmates and all the faithful at Fort Providence. It seemed as if all present would willingly have spent the whole night at the feet of the Blessed Virgin Mother!

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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In 1916 took place the edifying death of one of the Children of Mary at St. Joseph's Convent, Great Slave Lake. Baptistine, when only four years old, lost her mother. Her father placed her in the hands of the Nuns at St. Joseph's Convent, where she made her first Communion on December 6, 1911. She had a great devotion to Our Blessed Lady, and she was admitted amongst the Children of Mary on December 8, 1913. In March, 1916, her father told her that he would take her away in July. She was extremely sorry to hear this; she asked the Blessed Virgin herself to take her, rather than to let her leave the Convent. She was then in very good health. In April, at the close of the annual retreat, she wrote down her good resolution, which she placed at the feet of the statue of Mary Immaculate. "To live a pure life, so as to please Our Blessed Lady." Soon after the retreat, her health began to decline, and her mysterious malady yielded to no treatment. On July 4, surrounded by the other Children of Mary, she received Holy Viaticum, and joyously offered to God the sacrifice of her young life. On July 13, she received Holy Communion for the last time, and the same day she expired in the Sister Superior's arms, whilst invoking Mary, and kissing the missionary cross of Father Duport.

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## THE FRUITS

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And now we will ask our readers to leave for a short while the Northern Dénés, and to return to those western wilds, of which we have said something in our second chapter. We cannot bring ourselves to omit telling the edifying tale we have heard of a little orphan of the Sauteux tribe, in those western hunting grounds, where the Grey Nuns, for three quarters of a century, have been training children for Heaven. In that particular sphere of labour, the Nuns have had to contend with the indifference, the obstinacy, and pride of a fierce pagan race. Yet in the tribe of the Sauteux, as in a field desolated by heathen brutality, Mary Immaculate, by the hands of the Sisters of Charity, gathered to her bosom a little flower of rare beauty. This little Sauteux girl was sent to the Convent by her father, to be taught how to read and write. But the father gave strict orders that she was not to be baptized. Having fallen ill, she was taken back to her tribe. Father Magnan, O.M.I., in a letter to the Society of the Holy Childhood, tells the rest of her story: "In the Convent she had heard the religious instructions and the prayers. The Hail Mary had made a deep impression upon her young mind. As she lay ill, in the Indian Reserve, she sent for an old woman, a Christian, and a near relation, and begged her to say that prayer in which the Holy Mother of God is asked to pray

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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for us in the hour of our death. The woman not only said the prayer, but she baptized the child, who was in immediate danger of death, and remained with her until the end. Just before her death she asked for her father, and begged him to give up his superstitions, and to embrace the Religion to which she now belonged by Baptism, and which, as she assured him, would bring him safely to heaven. Then she turned to her Catholic relation, asking her to repeat the prayer to Holy Mary. After the last invocation, the little girl said: "What a beautiful prayer! Father, be converted to the Catholic Religion, and come with me to heaven," and she expired. The father sobbed, but said nothing. For a long time there seemed to be no change in him. But the grace of God had made its way into his heart, and was bearing fruit. A year after his little daughter's death, he himself entered upon his last illness. He sent for the Priest, who was then with the Indians of another reserve fifteen miles away. To him he told all about his child, and her last words to him, and he begged the Priest to instruct and baptize him also, and to open to him the gates of heaven. So his daughter's time in the Convent had not been in vain."

Let us return now to our Northern Dénés. We

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## THE FRUITS

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have already said something about the Convent girl-pupils, and their piety. The boys, on their part, are enrolled as the Guard of Honour of the Sacred Heart. Proudly they carry their Banner of the Sacred Heart, and wear the medal and badge. And great care do they take to be counted worthy of admission into the Guard.

St. Joseph's Convent in 1914 began to contribute, as we may say, to a special "Treasury of the Sacred Heart." Into a little box, at the foot of St. Joseph's statue in the corridor, the inmates of the house (both Nuns and pupils) slip now and then a little unsigned mention of some act of virtue, which has been inspired by love of the Sacred Heart. On the first Friday of the month, these are taken out and counted, the numbers being entered in a special register, which is surely copied by some recording angel. The gathered slips of paper are left before the altar during Mass, and remain all day near the Blessed Sacrament, until they make a sort of holocaust after Benediction. The register shows that between December, 1914, and May, 1915, there were 37,719 Acts of mortification.

The 1895 volume of the Annals of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate contains a description of "Christmas Night at the North Pole," written by Father Lecorre, who was for many long years Chaplain to the Grey Nuns in the Far North. He



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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paints a beautiful picture of that midnight, so dear to Indians, with its starry skies and its flashes of the Northern Lights. He tells how from out the depths of all the forests come the Indians, their sleigh-bells making music in the frosty air. They assemble in great numbers for the Midnight Mass at the Crib side, rendering the Divine Child the homage of hearts regenerated by grace, and seeming to delight in such thoughts as made St. Bernard vary the words of the Psalmist, and say *Parvus Dominus et amabilis nimis!* The scene described by Fr. Lecorre has been often seen at Providence Mission, where it is the custom of the Nuns to bring forward their First Communicants in the front row of those who are invited by *Adeste, Fideles*, and who salute the happy night and morn of the Nativity with a renewed *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. One passage from Fr. Lecorre's article we must quote here, for it may be said to give the sum and substance of this book about the Grey Nuns and their work in the North. "After the Indians and Half-Breeds, I will tell you of the flower of the flock, growing up under the Divine influence of the Sacred Heart. They are our children of the Sacred Heart Orphanage, so admirably managed by the devoted Sisters of Charity. They are nearly all orphans, belonging to the various Indian tribes—Montagnais, Yellow-Knife, Slave, Flat-Dog-

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## THE FRUITS

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Rib, Hareskin, Sekanais, and Loucheux. To see them at Christmas, in their gay attire, and with their smiling innocent faces, forming as it were a Guard of Honour round their Divine Brother of Bethlehem, and singing their beautiful hymns, no one could ever imagine what they were like when first brought to the good Nuns. We Missionaries have seen Indian and Eskimo children in the wigwams of the Northern forests and steppes, and on the shores of the frozen sea; we know their degraded condition, physical and moral; and we bless God daily for the marvellous transformation wrought, at the cost of many sacrifices, by the persevering care, the greater than motherly care, of our wonderful Grey Nuns. Surely the Sisters of Charity are the special creation of Him who imposed hands upon little children, saying, "Suffer them to come unto me."

In the five Convents which the Sisters of Charity have established in the North in order to bring children to Christ, there have been innumerable and charming instances of the piety and simplicity of the Indian children. Perhaps some industrious hand will one day gather together a selection of such touching examples, and present them to the world as a true odour of sweetness. A very few of these examples have cropped up here and there, in

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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the course of these pages. Before we conclude, let three or four more be culled, as some small token of our grateful admiration for those devout women not a few, who have laboured with us in spreading the Gospel of Christ.



LOUIS

In St. Joseph's Convent, for the last seven years, lives little Louis of the Dog-Rib tribe. All who know him—pupils, Priests and Nuns—look upon him as a really pious child. When he first came he seemed strong. But tuberculosis of the bones be-

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## THE FRUITS

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gan to appear. Gradually he became deformed, and covered with sores. He could not walk without crutches, and after a time he was so paralyzed that he had to be carried in a chair. He now suffers a great deal, but he never complains. During the dressing of his sores, he perspires, and the tears flow from his eyes, but with his lips he tries to smile. One day the Father Superior told him he had seen in one of the huts a little boy who had the same disease. "Oh," said poor Louis, "he must be suffering a great deal." This was the only mention of his own sufferings which ever escaped him. He always unites his sufferings with those of our Blessed Lord, and he loves to hear about the Passion. It is his constant desire to do the will of God in all things, like Him who suffered for us. Daily Communion is his great happiness, and seems to transfigure him. Being very intelligent, and knowing very well Montagnais, French, and English, he teaches the Catechism in these languages to the newcomers, and his clear explanations have often made older instructors say, "Out of the mouth of children Thou hast perfected praise." Louis, with ease, repeats, and explains for the others, the sermons of Father Falaize. The other children have a real veneration for him, without his noticing it.

There was another Montagnais pupil of the

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Nuns, who was called Peter. He died at the Holy Angels' Convent in 1913. All who knew him felt more inclined to ask his intercession, than to pray for him. In 1909, whilst still with his own family, he had a serious illness. His parents made a vow to give him to the Oblate Fathers, if he recovered. He got better so quickly that his recovery was thought miraculous. As a pupil of the Convent, he was a model of piety and obedience. But Peter fell ill again. One day he said, "If I recover, I shall become a religious, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate." One of his young companions asked him. "Would you rather die, or become an Oblate?"

"It would be better to die," said Peter, "because even as a religious I might offend God."

On another occasion, the Sister Infirmarian encouraged him to take a very bitter medicine. He drained it to the dregs, and said, "It is not as bitter as what our Blessed Lord had when on the Cross."

Peter asked one of the Sisters if the soul in Purgatory could see God.

"No, my child," was the answer; "we see God in the moment of judgment, and then no more until we get into heaven."

"Well," said Peter, "I would rather not go to Purgatory: I prefer to suffer longer upon earth, so as to go straight to heaven."



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## THE FRUITS

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The poor child's prayer seems to have been heard, for he did suffer a great deal. In his agony he appeared as if some terrible vision were before him. Then he became calm and joyful, and passed away in perfect peace.

Here now is another example of an Indian child's holy death:

The Sister Superior at Providence writes: "Our little Julia looked so beautiful in her coffin. She had a smile upon her face. She has been laid at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, the good Mother whom she loved so much. Many a time she has spent hours before Our Lady's altar, even during her long illness. How many edifying examples she has left her companions! She never complained; she was never melancholy. She was very charitable too. Every night she said a prayer to her Guardian Angel, asking him to remain about her bed. At the head of her bed she wrote with her own hand, 'Frequent Communion is our noviceship for heaven.'"

At this very moment, in the Convent at Lake Athabaska, it is impossible not to recognize the working of God's grace in a marvellous attraction towards the Blessed Eucharist found in a very young child of the Cree tribe. This little Chris-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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tina is perhaps more precocious than "Little Nellie of Holy God." Her first distinct word was "Jesus." Christina made her First Communion on December 8, 1915, at the age of two years and eleven months. Even half a year earlier, she quite understood the meaning of Holy Communion, and she knew perfectly well the essential parts of the catechism, as we ourselves had occasion to discover.

In the second Christmastide of her life, Christina was exactly two years old. Her teacher told her all about the Crib, the Shepherds, the Wise Men, the lights and decorations round about the Child in the Manger. She was not so interested as the teacher expected. She went to say her prayers before the Tabernacle. One of the Sisters said to her one day, "I never see you paying a visit to the beautiful Crib. All the other little girls go there to see the Infant Jesus."

Christina replied: "There, Infant Jesus not alive. Here, in little house, He is alive, and me can speak to Him."

She was not happy until she was allowed to get up in time for Mass. At Benediction, she usually fixed her eyes upon the Blessed Sacrament, and prayed well. One evening, however, she forgot herself and prattled a while. The Sister Superior, to humiliate her, said aloud in the recreation room, "Christina has not been good at all. She is not to

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## THE FRUITS

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go to Mass or Benediction any more. She will have to stay in bed." Christina said nothing, but the tears came into her eyes. A few minutes later, little knuckles were knocking at the door of the community room. Christina had come to beg par-



CHRISTINA

don. "Will be good little girl," she said. "Want you to take me again to Mass."

One afternoon the child was found crying, having been accidentally left by herself. The Sister who found her asked what was the matter. She answered, "Me all alone."

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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"Oh, no, my child," said the Nun, "Jesus, our Lord, is always with you: He is everywhere."

This was enough to dry Christina's tears.

A day or two later, she happened to meet the same Sister, of whom she asked, "Sister, you all alone?"

"Yes," said the Nun.

"No," said the little one; "the Infant Jesus is with you; He is everywhere; and He came there in your heart in Mass. I love Jesus too."

Christina had often made her way to the altar rails with the other children, before there was time to stop her. But the Celebrant would pass her by. At last the longed-for day came, and on the feast of the Immaculate Conception 1915, this little innocent also received the Blessed Sacrament.

Before her First Communion, this little one, when she thought no one saw her, used to go to the altar rails, and draw out the Communion cloth between the rails, for she was too small to be able to lift it over the top. Then she would say, holding it under her face, "Give me Jesus." It is remarkable that since her First Communion she has never done this.

The only thing that troubles Christina now is being allowed to remain asleep in the morning. As she is a delicate child, the Nuns do not always call her early. But she is sure to say. "Sister, why

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## THE FRUITS

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did you not call me? Will not the little Jesus come into my heart to-day?"

Will this little angel be long for this world? It seems doubtful. If she should early be found ripe for heaven, Pope Pius X., the children's friend, will welcome her, and he will smile with blessing on the Sisters of Charity of the Far North, who bring to Jesus God's little children of the woods.



## EPILOGUE

FIFTY years have come and gone! During that half century, some apostolic souls, as poor in earthly resources as the Galilean missionaries themselves, have been spreading the light of the Gospel, and winning souls to Christ, in the immense pagan desert of Athabaska-Mackenzie, a very wild and lone land, hardly known to the civilized world. The pioneers have sown in sorrow; the newer comers have reaped, though not without tears. Presenting their sheaves to the Lord of the Harvest, all have been able to say, "The Poor have the Gospel preached to them."

Among those labourers of the half-century, the Grey Sisters occupy a large place. We have already mentioned the names of the strong and valiant women of 1867. Their names come to the point of our pen once more, at the close of our little review of their lives of devotion and self-sacrifice. Four of them have gone to their eternal rest and reward. Two have kept their Golden Jubilee here below.

Sister Michon and Sister Brunelle never again saw the Mother House, from which they parted in 1867.

Sister Michon died in the Sacred Heart Hospi-

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## EPILOGUE

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tal, at Providence, on October 23, 1896, after twenty-nine years of labour in that Mission. She had prayed that she might not be recalled to Montreal, because she preferred to die amidst her poor Indians. Her death was as calm and as peaceful as her life. "Not a moment of agony; not a struggle; she just sank to rest, a blessed content upon her face. The last survivor at Providence of those who founded the Hospital there, she fell, as we may truly say, on the field of honour, having never lost the spirit of perfect obedience, and of absolute conformity to the Holy Will of God, and having left the odour of her religious virtues as an inheritance very precious to the community which she loved."

Sister Brunelle died on December 10, 1908, at Lake Athabaska, after twenty-six years of mission work at Providence, and fifteen in the Convent of the Holy Angels. She had suffered from cancer, and had suffered with most edifying patience. After her death, the following words told how much she was missed: "Everything looks sad to-day. The community room is like a desert; one's heart sinks on going in: she who was so usually seen there is gone. Two weeks ago she sat there at her work-table. Some of her books are still in the press: she was very clever in binding. Some of her artificial flowers are unfinished: she was wonderfully skilful in making them. And what a lot of

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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time she managed to give to mending! This was her most usual occupation. She was always most exact, even in the least things, and never wasted a moment. With her, everything was foreseen and fore-arranged. In a word, she was for us all a model of the perfect religious. As she had charge of the Sacristy and the Chapel, she had much opportunity for her private devotions. I seem still to see her in adoration at the foot of the altar."

Sister Michon rests at Notre Dame de la Providence, and Sister Brunelle at Lake Athabaska, in the midst of their pupils who went before or after them into heaven. Over their graves their Sisters often pray, taking fresh courage, and growing more and more attached to their holy vocation. Out of some tombs hearts may spring into newness of life.

Sister St. Michael, on November 23, 1909, and Sister Lapointe, on January 6, 1911, were laid to rest in Montreal, near their beloved Foundress. Yet it would have been their own wish to die in their far-off Mission, amongst the little ones of Christ. Their recall to other posts after, in the one case twenty, in the other fifteen, years, added the merit of a new sacrifice to that of a desire which was already self-sacrificing.

Sister Domithilda Letendre still, joyously and courageously, serves God in His poor at St. Albert, in Alberta. The Franciscan Tertiaries in Mont-

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## EPILOGUE

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SISTER DOMITHILDA (1919).

In 1867, being then only a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, she accompanied the group of Foundresses of The Sacred-Heart Hospital, to Fort Providence.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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real had been for some time assistants of the Grey Nuns before she, as one of those Tertiaries, accompanied those who made the great foundation of 1867. In 1889, the Mother General, Rev. Mother Filiatrault, summoned an extraordinary General Chapter, to debate, and to decide, the making of the Association of "Little Coadjutor Sisters" an integral part of the Religious Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal. The union has brought special blessings upon the works of the venerated Mother d'Youville.

"Little" these new Sisters are, through their modesty, humility, love of the hidden life, which make them worthy daughters of the Venerable Foundress.

"Coadjutors" they are too, and most efficient coadjutors, especially in the Far North.

"Sisters" they are also, by their consecration to God in religion, by their habit, by the Cross which they wear, and above all, by their faithful following of the charge given to all her children by Mother d'Youville, "Take care that the most perfect union may always reign amongst you."

We have been led to say all these things through mentioning the name of that devoted Coadjutor, Sister Domithilda.

Now there remains another name, the name of



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## EPILOGUE

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REV. MOTHER WARD (1919).

The sole survivor of the five Sisters, Foundresses of  
the Sacred Heart Hospital at Fort Providence,  
Mackenzie, in 1867.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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another survivor of the 1867 group. One of the Twelve Apostles was left long on earth, to bear witness of what he had seen, and heard, and handled, until the Church was well established. Of one of the Foundresses of the Missions in the Far North, it would seem as if Our Lord had said, "I will have her to remain until all the tribes to whom I have sent my apostles have been gathered in." And this religious may justly say, like the Beloved Disciple, "I give testimony of what I have seen, and my testimony is true." Good and venerated Mother Ward is the Saint John of the first Nuns of the Far North. To her poor Indians at Fort Providence she gave twenty-five years of the flower of her youth. To them also, as well as to all the poor clients of the Sisters of Charity, she has given twenty-five other years, for as mistress of novices, Assistant of the Mother General, Superior of the Community in charge of the General Hospital of Montreal, and Mother Provincial, she has, by word and example, helped to form a host of other Missionary Sisters, for whom her memory and her heart have been an open book, in which they have read the lessons of the apostolic times.

May she rejoice in the Lord always over the great things which it has pleased God to work by her hands, and may she live for many years yet beside the chief Mother of our Missionary Sisters.

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## EPILOGUE

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We do not forget that Mother Ward wrote so long ago as 1885: "Our fish is very good, and we eat it with such an appetite that we are in danger of dying of old age."

When Mother Ward in 1906 went to visit and encourage her successors in the Mackenzie country, great was the rejoicing on the part of her old pupils at Fort Providence, who came in crowds to meet her. The little children too came very eagerly to see and to speak to their "Grandmamma," the Mother of their own Mothers. To her it was a great consolation to witness such evidences of gratitude and of a truly Christian spirit. But a still greater consolation was it to perceive in the Community the same devotedness and self-denial as in the early days, and to be able to adopt as her own the words of the Mother General in 1898: "Everywhere I have found the same zeal in teaching the children to know, love, and bless God; the same charity in regard of the orphans, the aged, and the neglected; the same devotedness and self-abnegation in regard of the sick; the same generosity in accepting the many sacrifices imposed by the remoteness and isolation of the places in which obedience requires those dear Sisters to carry on their apostolate of charity and love. In a word, I have everywhere recognized the Hall-mark of the true work of our holy Foundress."

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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Is it possible that there can be higher praise than this? Well, yes; we know of even higher praise, and it is our duty to make it known to others. In 1898, in an audience of Pope Leo XIII., Bishop Grouard was giving an account of his Vicariate. He was asked the number of the missionaries, and he told the number of the Fathers and Brothers. And then he added: "Holy Father, we have Nuns also: they teach and train the children." The Pope asked, "What country do they come from?"

"They are Canadians, Your Holiness," said the Bishop; "they come to us from Montreal, and belong to the Congregation of the Grey Nuns, who have had two communities in my Vicariate for a long time past. Lately, the Sisters of Providence also have come to us, and they too come from Montreal."

"How are they able to live in such a country?" the Pope inquired; "and how are they affected by the climate?"

The Missionary Bishop had to declare that indeed their sufferings were great, and their privations such as would be incredible in a civilized country, and that one of them (it was Sister Galipeau) had just died in the neighbourhood of the Mackenzie River.

The Pope, after listening earnestly, lifted up his hands and eyes, as if appealing to heaven, and said:



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## EPILOGUE

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"They are really sacrificing their lives for God and His Church."

No one has been better acquainted with the Grey Nuns than the Oblate Bishop who heard that mighty eulogy. It was he who welcomed Mother d'Youville's daughters to the Far North, who was their first spiritual Father there, and who shared their sufferings and their joys. We will therefore close this book with the words which he wrote, not long ago, in reply to a letter of congratulation sent from Montreal, on a certain anniversary.

"Dear Reverend Mother,—

I am most grateful for all your kind wishes for myself and for our Missions. I thank you particularly for the prayers which you and your Community are good enough to offer to God in our behalf. At all times, indeed, we are in need of God's grace, but never have I more felt the need of it than at present, when I have been afflicted by blow after blow. Three of our excellent Brothers have been drowned, our steam saw-mill has been destroyed by fire, and there have been other trials too numerous to mention.

But I must tell you that in the midst of all this your spiritual children give me great consolation. They are good, religious, faithful in the fulfilment of every duty. Their good works are admirably successful. May you live to see the number of



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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your Sisters of Charity greatly multiplied, and all the newcomers walking in the footsteps of their precursors.”

† E. GROUARD, O.M.I.,  
BISHOP OF THORA,  
*Vicar Apostolic of Athabaska.*

## APPENDIX

THE MAIN WORKS HELD PRESENTLY, BOTH IN  
CANADA AND UNITED STATES, BY THE FIVE  
GREAT FAMILIES OF THE GREY NUNS  
FOUNDED BY THE VENERABLE  
MOTHER D'YOUVILLE.

I.—THE GREY NUNS OF MONTREAL.—The Sisters  
of Charity of the General Hospital  
of Montreal.

*List of the Sisters, who have been missionaries  
in the Far North, (Mackenzie Province),  
from 1867 to 1919:*

*Choir Sisters:*—Srs. Lapointe, Ward, Saint-Michael,  
Michon, Brunelle, Daigle, Gauthier, Brochu, Fournier,  
Lemay, Massé, Ste.-Angèle, Boisvert, Saint-Charles, St.-  
Pierre, Columbine, Beaudin, Martin, Séguin, Galipeau,  
Doucet, Pigeon, Jobin, McDougal, de Lorimier, St.-  
Elzéar, Généreux, St.-Grégoire, Delorme, Grandin,  
Léveillé, Boursier, Pinsonnault, Dufault, McQuillan,  
Lachance, St.-Omer, Ste.-Albine, Ste.-Victorine, Davy,  
Laverty, Girouard, Lavoie, McGuirk, St.-Vincent de  
Paul, St.-Cyr, Beaudry, Fortin, Verdon, Gadbois, Ste.-  
Eugénie, Latrémouille, Olivier, Ste.-Rose de Lima,  
Rouleau, Gilbert, Lemaire, Ste.-Dosithée, Nicol, Lusignan.

*Little Coadjutor Sisters:*—Srs. Marie Domithilda, Yves,  
Eustache, Rogatien, Donatien, Denise, Didace, Honorine,  
Ernestine, Firmin, Pulchérie, Bruno, Julienne, Darie,  
Evariste, Xavérine, Sylvain, Cécilia, Noélia, Florestine,  
Damase, Zénon.

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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### *Institutions of the Grey Nuns of Montreal:*

#### *Diocese of Montreal:*

1.—*In the City of Montreal:*—The mother-house—the Creche, or nursery—four hospitals—four homes for old men and women—three day nurseries—the Nazareth blind asylum—five orphanages—two patronages for young girls (d'Youville and Killarney)—three hospices for the aged and infirm—a school for training in household work.

2.—*Outside of the City of Montreal:*—An orphanage at Notre-Dame de Liesse—a farm at St.-Laurent—a hospital at St.-Jean—a school and a home at St.-Benoit—three homes at Varennes, Chambly and Longueil.

*Diocese of Valleyfield:*—A school, at Chateauguay—a home for the aged orphans, at Beauharnois.

*Diocese of Mont-Laurier:*—A sanitorium, at Ste.-Agathe des Monts.

*Diocese of St.-Boniface:*—A provincial house, a novitiate, an orphanage, a home, and two hospitals, at St.-Boniface—three schools, namely at Ste.-Anne des Chênes, at La Broquerie, at St.-Norbert—Indian boarding schools, at Kenora, and at Fort-Francis.

*Diocese of Winnipeg:*—A boys' orphanage at Winnipeg—schools, at St.-Vital, and St.-Francois-Xavier.

*Diocese of Regina:*—Indian Industrial School, at Lebreton—Indian boarding school, at Lestock—hospital and training school for nurses at Regina.

*Diocese of Edmonton:*—At St.-Albert: parochial school, orphanage, farm, and care of the poor and sick; Indian boarding school for boys and girls; Indian Industrial School for boys—Boarding School for white children.—

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## APPENDIX

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At Edmonton: hospital, with training school for nurses.

—At Saddle Lake: Indian boarding school.

*Diocese of Calgary*:—At Calgary: hospital, with training school for nurses—At Dunbow: Indian Industrial and boarding school.

*Diocese of Prince Albert*:—At Saskatoon: hospital with training school for nurses.

*Vicariate Apostolic of Keewatin*:—Indian boarding schools, at Lac La Plonge, and Ile à La Crosse.

*Vicariate Apostolic of Mackenzie*:—At Fort Providence, and likewise at Fort Resolution, Fort Smith, and Fort Simpson, in each case, Indian boarding school, home and hospital for the aged, care of the sick in their homes, and care of the public church.

*Vicariate Apostolic of Athabaska*:—At Lake Athabaska, the same good works as in the Mackenzie vicariate.

*Diocese of Toledo (United States)*:—At Toledo: orphanage, hospital, and training school for nurses.

*Diocese of Boston (U.S.A.)*:—At Cambridge: hospice for incurables—At Lawrence: orphanage, home for the aged, and care of the sick—At Boston: patronage for young girls.

*Diocese of Springfield (U.S.A.)*:—At Worcester: orphanage.

*Diocese of Manchester (U.S.A.)*:—At Nashua: orphanage, and also hospital with training school for nurses.

*Diocese of Trenton (U.S.A.)*:—At New Brunswick: hospital with training school for nurses.

*Diocese of Fargo (U.S.A.)*:—At Fort Totten: Indian boarding school.







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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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II.—THE GREY NUNS OF OTTAWA.—Sisters of  
Charity called Grey Nuns of the Cross.

*Their Institutions:*

*Diocese of Ottawa:*

- 1.—In the city of Ottawa:—Mother-house and novitiate—twenty-four parochial schools—general hospital—two homes—two orphanages—Sacred Heart boarding school, being an academy affiliated to Ottawa University for Matriculation examinations.
- 2.—Outside of the city of Ottawa:—Parochial schools, at Embrun, Youville Farm, Casselman, L'Orignal, Bourget, Rockland, Hawkesbury, Clarence Creek, South Indian, Hull (three), Wrightville, Gatineau, Aylmer, Monte-Bello, Buckingham—house of refuge for the Aged, at L'Orignal.—Boarding schools, at Aylmer and Monte-Bello.—Normal school, at Hull.—hospital, at Buckingham.

*Diocese of Mont-Laurier:*—Parochial school and hospital, at Maniwaki.

*Diocese of Temisamingues:*—Parochial school, boarding-school and hospital, at Ville-Marie.

*Diocese of Nicolet:*—Boarding-school, at St.-Francois du Lac.

*Diocese of Three-Rivers:*—Parochial schools, at Pointe du Lac, and Shawinigan Falls.

*Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie:*—Parochial schools, at Chelmsford, Verner and Sudbury—hospitals, at Sudbury and Sault Ste.-Marie.

*Diocese of Pembroke:*—At Pembroke: parochial school, boarding-school and hospital—At Mattawa: parochial school and hospital—At Eganville: parochial school.

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## APPENDIX

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*Diocese of Boston (U.S.A.)* :—Three parochial schools, at Lowell.—parochial school at Haverhill.

*Diocese of Buffalo* :—Holy Angels' Academy, parochial school and d'Youville college, which gives courses for degrees in Arts, Science, Philosophy, Music and Pedagogy.

*Diocese of Ogdensburg (U.S.A.)* :—At Ogdensburg: parochial school of Holy Cross, Sacred Heart Academy, orphanage and home for the aged, two hospitals.

*Among the Indian missions, the Grey Nuns of Ottawa have two Institutions:*

- 1.—At Odanak—Mission of the Abenakis (near Pierre-ville, diocèse of Nicolet). In 1886, they opened a school, and in 1902, they established themselves definitely on the reserve, with Srs. Woods, Marie-Joseph, Jeanne-Françoise and Agnes.
- 2.—At Albany—(James' Bay)—Holy Angels' orphanage, founded, in 1902, by Sisters Ste.-Martine, Ste.-Felix de Valois, Ste.-Jules, and Ste.-Perpétue, in behalf of an Indian tribe of the great Algonquin race.

This Mission of the Grey Nuns of Ottawa was exceedingly hard and difficult. The Sisters however displayed a devotedness which could scarcely be surpassed. They conferred untold blessings on the poor helpless children scattered over this desolate coast, and one which is ever exposed to the biting winds of the frozen North.

We ought also to mention that some of the first Grey Nuns of Ottawa came to Red River (St.-Boni-

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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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face) in the early days, and that they rivalled both in merit and courage their sister companions of Montreal.

### III.—THE GREY NUNS OF QUEBEC.—Sisters of Charity of Quebec.

#### *Their Institutions :*

#### *Diocese of Quebec :*

1.—In the city of Quebec:—Twenty houses, of which: the mother-house with novitiate—four hospitals—three homes for the aged—three orphanages—two academies—five schools—a boarding-school—a kindergarten—Cap Rouge convent—Mastai sanatorium.

2.—Outside of the city of Quebec:—Twenty-two houses, of which: nine academies: Deschambault, Plessisville, St.-Anselme, St.-Nicholas, St.-Charles, St.-Alexander, Cap St.-Ignatius, St.-Alphonsus Thetford—a home and an academy at Levis, Ste.-Anne Lapocatière, and St.-Andrew; convent, asylum and hospital, at St.-Ferdinand of Halifax; academy and hospital, at St.-Joseph Beauce; home for the aged and orphans, at St.-Thomas Montmagny; convent at St.-Vital of Lambton; convent and home, both, at St.-John Deschaillons, and at St.-Edward of Lotbinière; convent at St.-Raymond; convent and hospital, at St.-Maurice of Thetford; home for the aged, at Beauceville.

*Diocese of Rimouski:*—Convent and home, at Rimouski; convent, both at Carleton and Cacouna.

*Diocese of Chicoutimi:*—Murray Bay convent.



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## APPENDIX

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*Diocese of Charlottetown (P.E.I.)*:—Hospital and orphanage, at Charlottetown.

*Diocese of Fall-River (U.S.A.)*:—Orphanage, at Fall-River, Mass.; young girls' home, at New Bedford, Mass.

*Diocese of Boston (U.S.A.)*:—Orphanage, at Lowell, Mass.

*Vicariate Apostolic of the Gulf of St.-Lawrence*:—Esquimaux Point convent.

IV.—THE GREY NUNS OF ST.-HYACINTHE.—Sisters of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu of St.-Hyacinthe.

### *Their Institutions:*

#### *Diocese of St.-Hyacinthe:*

1.—In the city of St.-Hyacinthe:—The mother-house, home, orphanage, St.-Genevieve's house of Industry, St.-Joseph's matary, St.-Charles' hospital, Youville's home, the Hotel-Dieu.

2.—Outside of the city of St.-Hyacinthe:—At Sorel, general hospital, orphanage and asylum; At Marieville, home of the Holy cross; At St.-Denis-sur-Richelieu, St.-Louis' home; At Farnham, St.-Elizabeth's home.

*Diocese of Sherbrooke*:—Sacred Heart and St.-Elizabeth's homes—general hospital also, at Sherbrooke.

*Diocese of Portland (U.S.A.)*:—At Lewiston (Maine) general hospital and Healy asylum.

*Diocese of Manchester (U.S.A.)*:—At Manchester, N.H., Notre-Dame hospital and St.-Peter's orphanage; At Berlin, N.H., St.-Louis hospital.



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## THE GREY NUNS IN THE FAR NORTH

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*Diocese of Providence (U.S.A.)*:—St.-Charles' orphanage, at Rochester, N.H.; St.-Anthony's Home, at Woonsocket, R.I.

*Vicariate Apostolic of Keewatin*:—St.-Anthony's hospital, founded at Le Pas, April, 1912, by Sisters Peltier, Senay, St.-Léon, and St.-Jean de-Dieu; orphanage and school for Indians.

V.—THE GREY NUNS OF NICOLET.—Sisters of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu of Nicolet.

### *Their Institutions:*

*Diocese of Nicolet*:

1.—In the city of Nicolet:—The mother-house, which, as all the other mother-houses of the Grey Nuns do, embraces all the works of mercy, both corporal and spiritual, towards the poor and needy, crippled or sick, from the aged to young children, orphans and abandoned; visits to the sick and poor outside and domiciliary night watches; a home for priests, sick or retired from the Holy ministry, and a department for lady boarders; St.-Joseph's Farm,—the convent of the Bishopric.

2.—Outside of the city of Nicolet:—A home, at St.-Célestin; hospital, home and patronage, at Drummondville.

*Diocese of Haileybury*:—A hospital and an orphanage, at la Tuque.

*Diocese of Calgary*:—Three houses for the service of the poor Indians; 1. A hospital for the Indians, at Blood Reserve, founded in 1893, by His Grace Mgr. Legal, O.M.I., Archbishop of Edmonton, then missionary among that

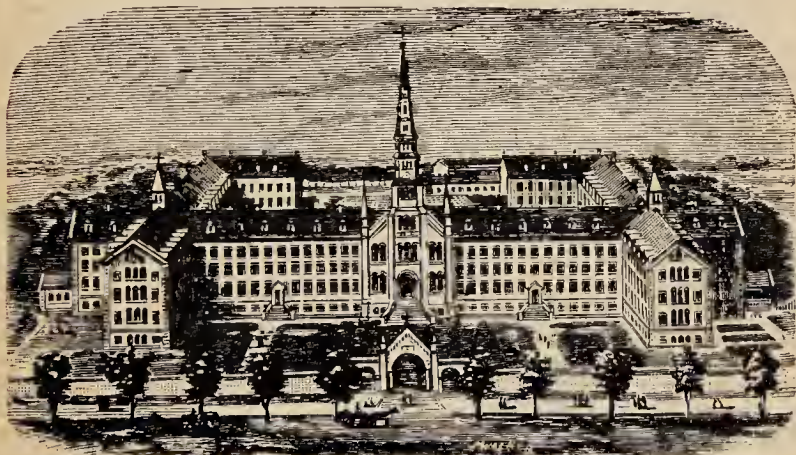
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## APPENDIX

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tribe. The Nuns of the first contingent were: Srs. St.-Eusébe, St.-Georges, St.-Joseph, St.-Louis and St.-Germain; 2. A boarding school, on the same reserve, founded in 1898; 3. A boarding school, founded at Piegan Reserve, by Sisters St.-Jean de Dieu, St.-Julien, and St.-Anne, in 1896.

THE GREY NUNS OF CANADA ARE ACTUALLY  
OVER FOUR THOUSAND.



THE MOTHER HOUSE OF THE GREY NUNS OF MONTREAL.

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SISTERS OF SERVICE OF CANADA





